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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

SUPER SPECIAL

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL L BOATZ
CHARLES S NOVINSKIE
associate editors

ROGER BROWN
DAN HAGEN
JACK C HARRIS
PAUL POWER
PAT JANKIEWICZ
PETER SANDERSON
RENEE WITTERSTAETTER
contributing editors

MACHINE WOLF GRAPHICS
art & tone direction

DON MARKSTEIN
typographer

TIMOTHY BOYER
SALLY GARLAND
T GORTEL
D HAMILTON
Y A QUIN
CAROLYN YOUNG
production

IGOR GOLDKIND
KIRK GROENEVELD
PATRICIA JERES
ED O'NEAL
JACK PEDOTA
JEFF WALKER
special thanks

ED
the bat

SLAM
the cat

PEEPS
the penguin

J R MATHER
international marketing director

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The DAK Knight

UP FRONT

DAK GOES BATS

The impending release of the BATMAN RETURNS movie had me eager with anticipation.

The waiting and the wondering are all part of the fun, of course, even if one runs the risk of great expectations leading up to a possible letdown.

Among many rumors that made the rounds was one to the effect that Warners had optioned film rights to a major DC graphic novel. When I first heard this, my mind immediately leapt to **Frank Miller's** DARK KNIGHT and I imagined a daring, controversial departure for a motion picture sequel.

Why not skip the predictable sequel and, having presented Batman's origin, now make the Dark Knight's last bow?

After all, the record-breaking BATMAN movie took the non-comics-reading public by surprise and shattered everyone's image of the campy character from TV, so why not take the world by surprise yet again?

Think of the flurry it would have caused, the attention it would have gotten! Such a bold, brilliant stroke was quite possibly the *only* way the producers could *ever* have hoped to rival their previous effort.

Of course, it didn't happen. And, alas, therein lies the danger of daydreaming and anticipating.

And the fun.

-Dak

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"Although I rewrote the script . . . I'm

WESLEY STRICK

In his nine-year career as a screenwriter, 38-year-old Wesley Strick has piled up credits for, among others, TRUE BELIEVER with James Woods and Robert Downey Jr., CAPE FEAR with Robert DeNiro, the hit chiller ARACHNOPHOBIA — and none for the 1992 blockbuster BATMAN RETURNS, although he wrote the shooting script. And therein lies a convoluted Hollywood tale, one of sundry such singular stories Strick ticks off in the following phone interview from his Los Angeles home . . .

DAN HAGEN: *How did you get into the business?*

WESLEY STRICK: How did I? I went to college with a guy who sort of made it in the business, and just encouraged me to give it a shot. And I wrote a screenplay, which was FINAL ANALYSIS. I don't know if you've . . .?

DAN: *I know the title. Refresh my memory.*

WESLEY: With **Richard Gere** and **Kim Basinger.** It was released about three months ago. But it was quite a few years ago that I wrote the script.

DAN: *So it was that long a process . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was that kind of hellish Hollywood development thing.

DAN: *Was the FINAL ANALYSIS script a labor of love, or . . .?*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was a spec script. I wrote it at work. I was working at a life insurance company, and I wrote it when the boss wasn't looking.

DAN: *It's about psychiatry, isn't it?*

WESLEY: Yeah, the hero is a forensic psychiatrist who gets trapped by a demented, manipulative **Kim Basinger.**

DAN: *Here's an odd coincidence, but there's a book called PSYCHIATRY IN THE CINEMA . . .*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah. I've heard about it. I haven't seen it.

DAN: *The co-authors are family friends of mine, the Gabbards. They're brothers who grew up here in Charleston, Illinois. One of them is a psychoanalyst and the other is a professor of comparative literature.*

WESLEY: Yeah, fortunately their book came out too soon for them to ridicule my movie . . .

DAN: *Exactly. They're going to do a new edition, though, so beware.* (Laughter.) *I was looking up Strick in some of my reference materials, and there's a director by the same name . . .*

WESLEY: Joseph Strick, yeah. No relation. He comes from the wealthy **Stricks.**

DAN: *Where'd you go to college?*

WESLEY: I went to UC Berkeley.

DAN: *And where'd you grow up?*

WESLEY: Manhattan.

DAN: *What's the Writers Guild rules thing, then, regarding BATMAN RETURNS?*

WESLEY: What it is, is that although I rewrote the script, I lost the credit arbitration. So, you know, technically I'm not supposed to claim credit for having been involved in the film. So it does get a little dicey, and I'm not really sure how much I should . . .

DAN: *Yeah, well, we'll work around*

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not supposed to claim credit for the film."

that.

WESLEY: I mean, we can talk off the record.

DAN: *Let me know when you want to go off the record, and we'll exclude those areas.*

WESLEY: Okay.

DAN: *Can you talk in general terms about the movie?*

WESLEY: I think so. Ask me the questions and I'll kind of make a judgment.

DAN: *Sure. My presumption was that you can't take specific credit for, like, "This was my scene, that was my scene.*

WESLEY: Yeah. Because, according to the bylaws, I'm not supposed to take credit at all.

DAN: *But you did work on the movie, and they can't take that away from you, presumably.*

WESLEY: That's true! *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *What's that rule all about, anyway?*

WESLEY: Well, you see, for years, I guess in the '30s and '40s, the writers felt that they were abused in terms of credits by producers and studio heads who would sort of put the names of their own nephew on the film. And so the Guild fought hard over the years to make the issue of credits just between and among writers, with the idea being that we'd be fair about it. And their other premise is that they like to limit the number of writers credited on a film, because on the average Hollywood movie, and especially a big-budget film, they have what they derisively call in the trade "serial writers." You know, one will come in after the next. There will be projects on which perhaps five, six, seven writers have labored. Out of those seven, one or two will get credit, you see. When the film is made, they appoint a committee of arbitrators who look at the material and determine who sort of made the biggest contribution, and they shut out the other writers on the theory that if you put a lot of writers' names up on the screen it tends to devalue the credit. So that's the theory. Unfortunately, that has the effect, sometimes, of depriving somebody . . .

DAN: *Of legitimate credit.*

WESLEY: Yeah, that happened to me. But it happens a lot.

DAN: *What was your involvement in the project, then?*

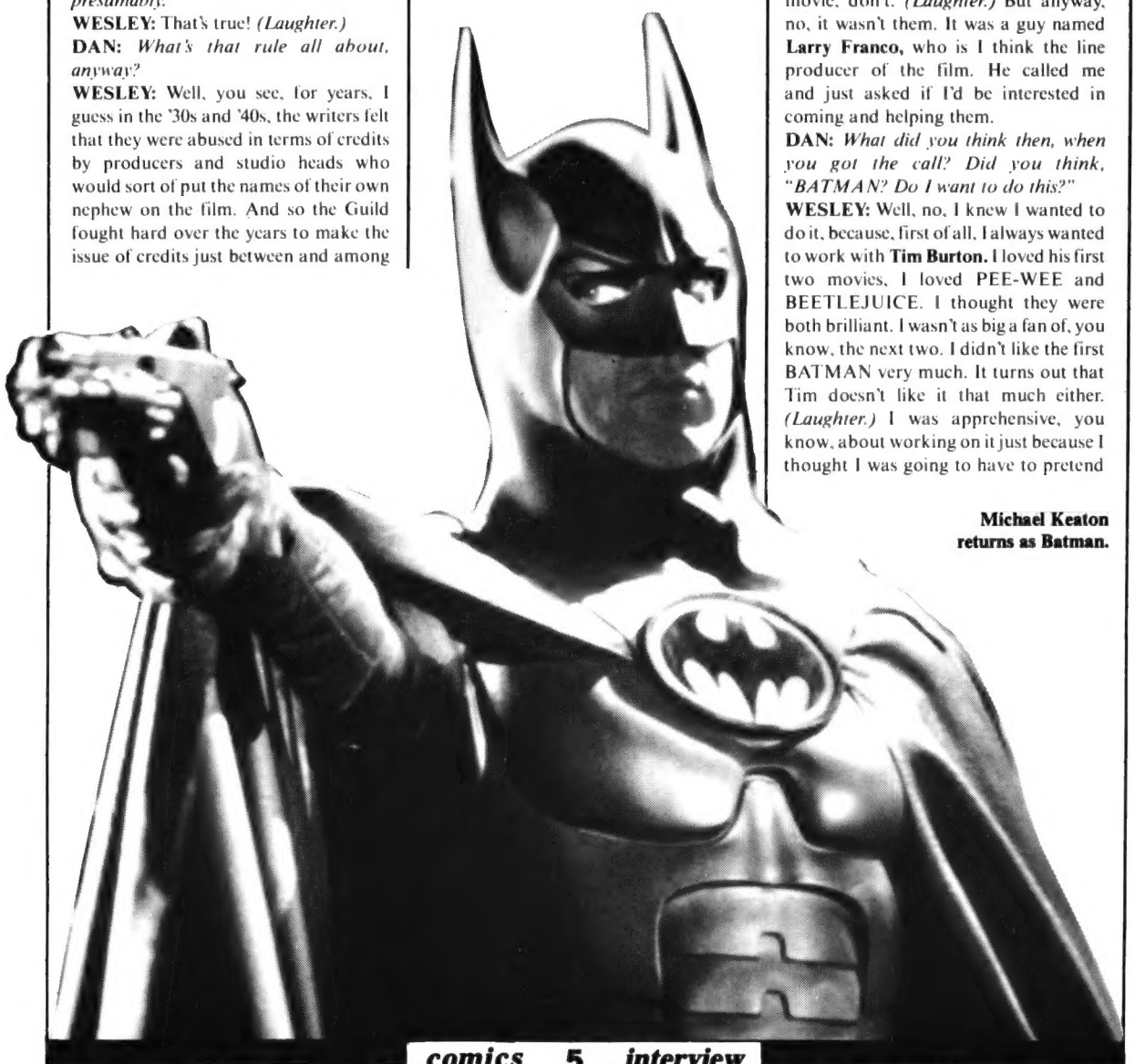
WESLEY: Well, last July I got a call from the producer, who I didn't know, but I think Warner Bros. had recommended me.

DAN: *Was it Jon Peters or Peter Guber or . . .?*

WESLEY: No, they're not involved. I think maybe their names are on it. You see, that's funny. Two guys that had nothing to do with the sequel have their names on it because of certain contractual deals that were made, whereas I who, like, rewrote the whole movie, don't. *(Laughter.)* But anyway, no, it wasn't them. It was a guy named **Larry Franco,** who is I think the line producer of the film. He called me and just asked if I'd be interested in coming and helping them.

DAN: *What did you think then, when you got the call? Did you think, "BATMAN? Do I want to do this?"*

WESLEY: Well, no, I knew I wanted to do it, because, first of all, I always wanted to work with **Tim Burton.** I loved his first two movies, I loved PEE-WEE and BEETLEJUICE. I thought they were both brilliant. I wasn't as big a fan of, you know, the next two. I didn't like the first BATMAN very much. It turns out that Tim doesn't like it that much either. *(Laughter.)* I was apprehensive, you know, about working on it just because I thought I was going to have to pretend



Michael Keaton returns as Batman.

"I didn't like the first BATMAN much.

Danny DeVito as the villainous Penguin.

Tim Burton thinks it was kind of boring."

the whole time that I was a huge fan of the first movie, but I quickly learned that Tim thinks that it was kind of . . . actually, he calls it boring.

DAN: *Really?*

WESLEY: I think he felt that it was out of his control. He had never made a movie on that scale before. it was a huge budget, too, for him at the time, and a lot of pressure. Clearly, having **Jon Peters** breathing down your neck also makes life difficult. And **Nicholson,** you know, is a big star. And I think Kim is not that easy. So between all of that, I think Tim kind of felt that it was a big ocean liner that was sailing, with or without him.

DAN: *The captain was somewhat irrelevant?*

WESLEY: Yeah, really, that does happen. So I think part of his incentive to do a second movie, aside from the big payday, was that I think he saw the sequel as a chance to really improve on the first movie, and sort of correct some of the conceptual mistakes that he felt he'd made the first time. And also, take advantage of the lesson he had learned on the first movie. I mean, he told me that he felt that only in the last three or four weeks of shooting the original film did he figure out how best to make a BATMAN movie. Like the best ways in which to show Batman . . .

DAN: *I was wondering about that, because I've talked to several people — among them Danny Bilson, who co-write the ROCKETEER screenplay and co-produced the FLASH TV show with Paul DeMeo, and Frank Miller — who all somewhat indicated that they found it kind of boring, too.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think it really pains Tim to talk about it. He doesn't like to discuss it, and he only talks about it when he has to — you know, when he has to refer to it for work purposes to make a point.

DAN: *There were only one or two times there where I saw scenes like Batman crashing through the skylight. You keep expecting to see superhero scenes, you know, where suddenly the awesome presence is there . . .*

WESLEY: Well, that's funny. He's not that interested in that. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Well, then you want to see something else of equal interest, you know?*

WESLEY: I think what Tim is interested in — aside from the visual things that he amuses himself with, and which he's quite brilliant at — in terms of the characters of the story, I think he's most interested in their neurotic compulsions. That's where he connects with Batman. He sees him as a — I mean, he's said this himself — he sees him as fucked up. And a guy who sort of hides from the world, and sort of only comes out at night, and doesn't quite know what he's doing. *(Laughter.)* I think he feels that way about himself as an artist, and I think that's how he connects with Bruce Wayne. Not as a superhero, but almost as an anti-hero. And he's really very little interested in the action. I mean, he knows that he has to deliver a certain amount of it or the audience will lynch him. And he wants it to be ingenious, but it's kind of a pain for him to have to think about, you know, big fights and all that. They're not his big interest.

DAN: *Well, that part of it I thought came through in the first movie — Michael Keaton as the neurotic Bruce Wayne was a fascinating touch.*

WESLEY: In fact — he never said this to me, but when he was making the first one he told somebody and this got back to me — his whole kind of take on the film and on the character was that Batman was a guy who didn't really know how to relate to women.

DAN: *Right. That comes through in Keaton's performance. And that isolation, too. This double life thing which doesn't permit any human beings in it, really, except Alfred . . .*

WESLEY: Right, except Alfred. But that, in a way, only emphasizes the loneliness.

DAN: *Exactly. Stan Lee once said that if you're going to do a superhero movie, you don't worry about the action — and actually, I suppose action's not really* that *easy to do — but the whole point is to try to make real people out of these characters, which are going to be even harder to accept than in an ordinary screenplay . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think that's true, because you're asking us to swallow a lot. Although with Tim, you know, his whole film universe is so stylized that I think you have to enter into it from frame one or not at all. You know, he doesn't really try to seduce you . . .

DAN: *Into believing it's reality?*

WESLEY: No, not at all. He presents his own reality, which is very unique to Tim. I think the reason it works, though, is that it's such a sort of intense vision. It's so vivid. Tim is just imaginative. It doesn't derive, obviously, from other sources. It's just unique to Tim, and I think you just accept it.

DAN: *Which makes it work well for the comic-book thing, in part, because that too is its own universe.*

WESLEY: Right. By the way, I don't know if you know this, but he also did not grow up a Batman fan, or even particularly a comic-book fan.

DAN: *I wondered about that.*

WESLEY: No, he wasn't a comic-book fanatic and he had no particular love for Batman.

DAN: *So he's coming to it fresh?*

WESLEY: Yeah, he is, and I was, too. I didn't have any expertise in the area, myself.

DAN: *Had you read them as a kid, or . . .?*

WESLEY: Yeah, a couple. But it wasn't real influential on me. I mean, I was as aware of Batman as any other American kid.

DAN: *Well, being the same age, we were both kids when the TV show hit it big . . .*

WESLEY: That's right, and it's funny. I've got to say that one of the big pitfalls for me — just about the only thing that I had any difficulty with in working on the film — was that occasionally I would write dialogue that was a little more, I think, appropriate for the television show or derived from the TV show than the original film. Because I was more familiar with the television show. You know, I've seen dozens of episodes as a kid, and only saw the first film once or twice. So on a few occasions there were lines of dialogue that were more suited to the style of the television show, and Tim had a pretty good radar for that. *(Laughter.)* He'd make me fix it. He hates cutesiness, and that was essentially what the TV show is. It's kind of precious, and he doesn't like that.

DAN: *The first BATMAN movie, I know a lot of people who really liked it — and obviously a lot of people did, looking at the business it did. And I know a lot of people who say, "But I didn't like it."*

WESLEY: Actually, a friend of mine made a funny comment about the box-office success of it. He said, "Imagine how much money it would have made if people liked it." *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Exactly, exactly. Which is a very odd statement, but somehow true.*

WESLEY: It's odd, but yes, there's some truth in it. I think this new one is a lot more likable, in fact.

DAN: *Which is what I've been hoping for.*

WESLEY: I think it's true. I've only seen a rough version of it, and it's hard to judge sometimes. And also because of my closeness to it, I can't be objective. But I think it is more warm-hearted, in a

"There was going to be a black Robin.

way. Tim would hate to hear me say that, but it's true. There's a kind of bigger-heartedness to it. I found the first one kind of nasty and needlessly kind of macabre and morbid. You know, all those images of the sardonic smile that were central to the whole story of the Joker, I found pretty off-putting. You know, I wouldn't let my kids watch it.

DAN: *And there, too, Batman and the Joker are, in a way, two grim psychotics who've taken over Gotham City . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, they are. And **Danny DeVito** is pretty psychotic in the new one, but I think what modifies the mood of it is **Michelle Pfeiffer.** Catwoman. Just adding her to the equation changes everything, and I think for the better.

DAN: *And, you know, these are all elements originally from the comic books of the '40s, so there won't be any objection from fans to seeing all this . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, I wouldn't think so, although I'm not all that familiar with the origin of Catwoman, traditionally, in the comic books.

DAN: *Um hmm. She was a character from 1940, originally.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I've noticed some reprints of old comic books in the bookstores featuring Catwoman. I guess they've just reprinted them to coincide with the film. And I know that the movie, you know, takes liberties with that . . .

DAN: *Oh, I'm sure. But this is, after all, a Batman who begins in the '90s, or the late '80s. So it's the legend recreated. What about Robin. What happened to him?*

WESLEY: He's out. He was briefly in. I think **Dan Waters,** who wrote the original draft, has said already in the press that neither he nor Tim was a big fan of Robin. You know, I don't think either of them knew quite what to do with him. **Waters,** I think, described him as a queasy little kid. *(Laughter.)* He was in when I took the script, but he was called "The Kid" and he was a garage mechanic and sort of a street urchin who kind of had a way with an automobile. And he helped Batman at a critical point in the story. But I sort of felt that his helping Batman then undermined Batman a little bit. It just sort of detracted from our sense of Batman's capabilities. And also, as it turns out, the shoot was so arduous and it ran so long and the movie was so costly that, about halfway through the show, people were looking for places to save. And one of them was clearly by cutting the kid. It saved pages.

DAN: *Sure. And you're introducing two new costumed characters, at least. If you introduce three, you're really piling it on with a trowel.*

WESLEY: Yeah, that's right. It was an embarrassment of riches. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *I heard one of the Wayans kids was supposed to play it?*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was, I think, **Marlon Wayans.** That was the only thing I felt bad about, was that the kid had already been cast and he must have thought that this was his big break, which it would have been.

DAN: *These are the IN LIVING COLOR guys, right?*

WESLEY: It's the younger brother.

DAN: *So we were going to have a black Robin, which would be interesting.*

WESLEY: There was going to be a black Robin. Another was I think Tim was a little nervous about that, too, because he didn't want it to seem as though he had set out to cast Robin as black. I think he felt that that was, somehow, a little condescending and also contrived. In fact, he auditioned a lot of different actors, black and white, and just settled on Marlon because he liked him. But I think he was also apprehensive that it was going to be seen as his attempt to be "racially correct." And he didn't want to be cast in that role as the Great Liberal Director.

DAN: *And I keep thinking, "Gee, if I want to know who Batman is, I'd look around Gotham City for a millionaire white guy living with a black kid."* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Right. That seems like a kind of pathetic Hollywood fantasy. But I think everyone was relieved to see Robin go — except for **Marlon Wayans,** I guess. That was the only thing that I felt sort of sad about.

DAN: *Sure. You say, "pathetic Hollywood fantasy?" I didn't follow you there.*

WESLEY: Oh, just that a millionaire entrepreneur like Bruce Wayne would . . . It just seemed phony.

DAN: *And it sticks out like a sore thumb. The first kid did, anyway. I mean, Dick Grayson does, too.*

WESLEY: It didn't really work.

DAN: *Not that we have to have believability in these, of course.*

WESLEY: No, but I mean dramatically, it's just awkward. I think it was a smart move of them to have left him out of the first one.

DAN: *Well, the comic, you know, ran a year or so before Robin was introduced.*

WESLEY: I can remember liking him as a kid. I think I identified with him, you know, as a 10-year-old.

DAN: *You did? I sort of thought he was in the way. I identified with Batman. The other problem — although you could turn this into a clever dramatic plus — is why would an adult man drag a kid into gunfire all the time?* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: That's true. And, in fact, in the screenplay that was a problem, and we were bending over backwards to try to explain it, and just got pretty silly after a point.

Everyone was glad to see Robin go."

DAN: *Let's see, other things. Michael Gough. Is he still in it?*
WESLEY: Yeah.
DAN: *Great.*
WESLEY: Yeah, he's a terrific guy. He's wonderful. (Pauses, chuckling over a memory.) He had a few, you know, complaints about his dialogue in the script, and I spent an evening with him. And it turned out he wanted me to change things like "can" to "shall." *(Laughter.)* It was really sweet.
DAN: *Oh, how demanding of him!* (Laughter.)
WESLEY: Exactly. And unlike most actors who don't like the dialogue you write, but can't begin to give you an inkling of what they would want, he knew exactly what changes he wanted to make, and it was like four words, altogether. He's a wonderful guy.
DAN: *That's superb. You know, you flip on the TV and you see black-and-white movies and there's Michael Gough in this and that . . .*
WESLEY: Yeah, he's been in everything! Before I went to meet him, I read his resume, and it was just extraordinary.
DAN: *Right. And that whole Alfred thing was such a nice touch in the first one. It brings Batman down to earth here. He doesn't have any great awe about Batman.*
WESLEY: No, not at all. He's just sort of concerned about him, about his mental stability.

Michelle Pfeiffer as the Catwoman.

DAN: *A gem of a character. What about Keaton? Did you run into him much?*
WESLEY: Oh, yeah. I worked with him quite a bit.
DAN: *How was that?*
WESLEY: Fine. He's very energetic. He's full of ideas. We had like one really big, intense session. And he also, like Tim, having done one of the movies already, sort of knew what works for Batman. And I think the thing that they both discovered after having done the first film is that brevity works best. When the guy's standing there in this essentially silly outfit on the big screen, he just can't start making speeches, because the camera has to linger on that. You need to find sort of the pithiest ways for him to express himself. He also needs to be concealed in shadow, and one of the tricks is that, you know, "now-you-see-him, now-you-don't." And a lot of it is done in clever cutting, where you return to the angle and he's gone. You know, you don't actually have to take him out of the frame.
DAN: *Sure. They did some of that in the first one . . .*
WESLEY: Yeah, and it worked really well.
DAN: *That's part of what I was talking about earlier as the superheroic awe thing. You know, you can always go, "Wha-? Where is he? Who is he? What is he?"*
WESLEY: That's right. And the audiences don't seem to tire of that particular effect. Plus it's economical, from every standpoint.
DAN: *Yeah, that's a great one. I had read a story somewhere saying that in the first one, Keaton had decided to, or someone had advised him to, "let the costume act" as Batman.*
WESLEY: Oh, is that right? I didn't hear that.
DAN: *Yeah. I think that's something of the same thing that you're saying, you know? Be brief, let the costume state its presence, emerge and vanish.*
WESLEY: Right, yeah. There are a couple of confrontations between Penguin and Batman, and one of them had been a little on the wordy side. And I think Tim just wanted me to pare it to, you know, literally 10 words, because he just didn't want to hold a two-shot with these two guys standing there, these two grown-ups, in all these prosthetics, trading *bon mots. (Laughter.)* That gets silly.
DAN: *And in this case with, as you say, all the stuff there, the visuals carry it anyway, or can.*
WESLEY: They do. They're the most impressive aspect of it, so you just don't

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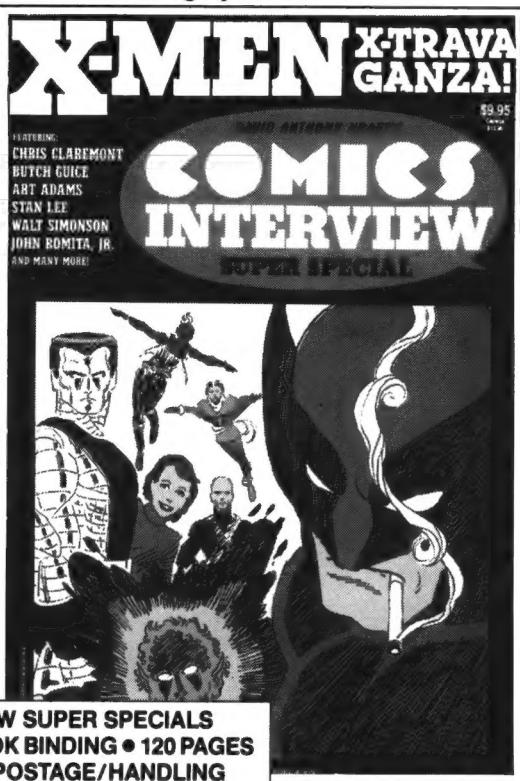

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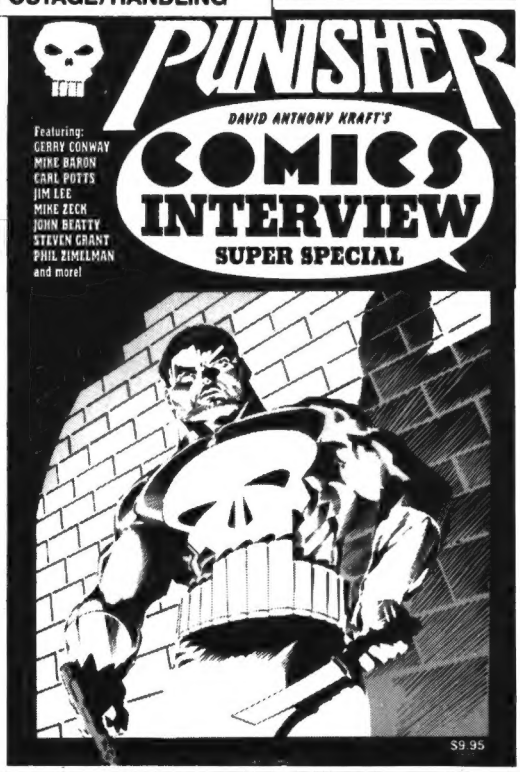

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"Just to type the word 'Batman' is exciting."

need to fill their mouths with all kinds of arch dialogue, which we've all heard already.

DAN: *That's fascinating. You've done all these realistic movies. Is it tougher doing a superhero or just a different set of problems?*

WESLEY: No, I thought it was really easy and really fun.

DAN: *Really?*

WESLEY: Yeah, very.

DAN: *In what ways?*

WESLEY: Well, partly it was fun because Tim, I think as I said to you before, was remarkably open. And I say "remarkable" because it's a big movie. The pressure on him was immense. He didn't know me. We'd never met before. And, when I was hired, it was about eight weeks before the start of shooting. And he gave me a lot of freedom. So right away, it's like an actor with a director, when you feel that you have the director's confidence, you do better work. So that was one of the reasons. That doesn't necessarily have anything specifically to do with this material, but it was just Tim, who gave me the space to just kind of do what I do. But also, I think it's a real relief to take a holiday from kind of grim reality. Having just come off CAPE FEAR, where we were trying for verisimilitude in almost every aspect of it, it was just fun. It's a fantasy, so you get to be fantastic, and that — at least in small doses — can be really liberating.

DAN: *I'm glad to hear you have that attitude toward it. Some people might say, "Oh, this crap . . ."*

WESLEY: Oh, no, not at all. I think there's the potential to do really brilliant stuff within that really stylized concept. Batman is an American icon. Just to be working on your computer and type the word "Batman" is kind of exciting. Like you're participating in something that is really central to the culture.

DAN: *I've just always wanted to compile a lot of interviews and materials, you know, which say, "What the hell does this stuff mean? And why do we believe in something so silly?"*

WESLEY: Right. Why do we suspend disbelief when we should know better?

DAN: *For something so outre, I think it says a lot about America.*

WESLEY: Both good and bad.

DAN: *Right, both good and bad. Let's see, what else? Paul Reubens, Pee-Wee. Is there anything you can say about him? I hear he has a cameo.*

WESLEY: Yeah, he's on real briefly as the Penguin's father. He just appears right at the beginning of the movie.

DAN: *He's an old friend of Tim Burton's?*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think Tim feels a great deal of loyalty to him. Because I think that he authorized Tim to direct the movie when Tim was nobody.

DAN: *Right. I tried to get an interview with him, Reubens, but he doesn't do interviews anymore. Understandably, I suppose.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I guess.

DAN: *Michael Keaton. I wanted to go back to him. If you've got any inkling, what does he feel about playing Batman? This is unusual because, unlike Chris Reeve or anybody else, he had an established career already . . .*

WESLEY: That's right.

DAN: *He was doing very well. But he still takes on this sort of secondary career as an icon.*

WESLEY: Yeah. I don't know, we never discussed it. It's funny. You know, I think everybody connected with the film feels a little bit divided about it. There is a part of people that knows, in a way, it's silly, and "Why are we wearing tights and standing on a refrigerated sound stage for six months?" And then I think the other part of everyone involved feels, yeah, that we're all creating a myth, a living myth. So I don't know, because **Keaton** and I never discussed it. We only discussed it to the extent that we talked about what works, just on a real practical level . . .

DAN: *Rather than a philosophical level?*

WESLEY: Yeah, we never did get philosophical about it.

DAN: *But of course, you know, Judy Garland and Ray Bolger probably felt real silly in '39, too.* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Yeah, exactly. So you live with that for six months, and then you pass into history.

DAN: *And you see what happens. Do you think movies like BATMAN, TERMINATOR, SUPERMAN are a fad in the business, or is this a permanent fixture that we'll always see a couple of?*

WESLEY: Can you hang on a second?

DAN: *Sure.*

WESLEY: Patty? *(A muffled few seconds' exchange in the background.)* Hi.

DAN: *Hi. I was just saying, these fantasy films, a fad or a permanent thing?*

WESLEY: Oh, I think it's permanent. I believe we'll see more, if only because the technology has improved immensely, and there's been this real great leap in the last year or two that I think TERMINATOR 2 was probably the vanguard of in terms of digital composite optical effects.

DAN: *Here are the things you saw in comic books, you know, but now you see*

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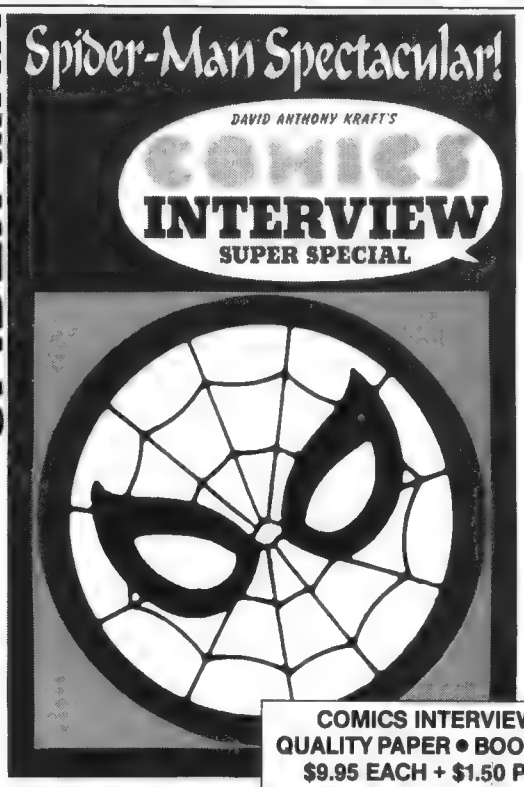

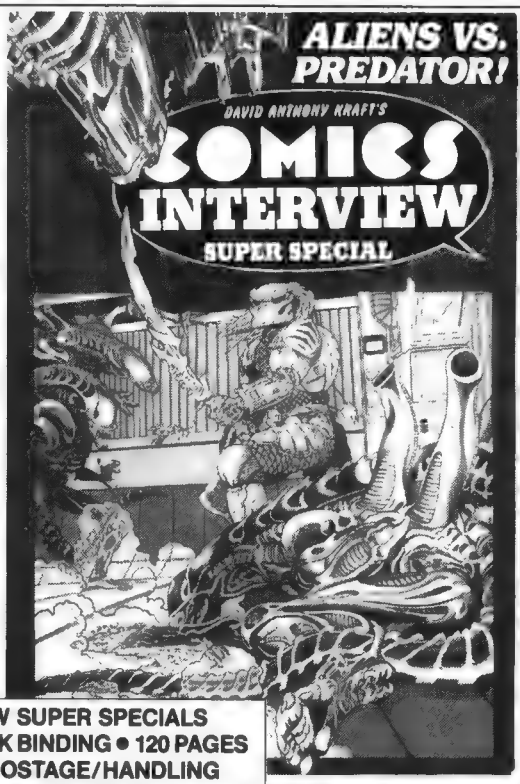

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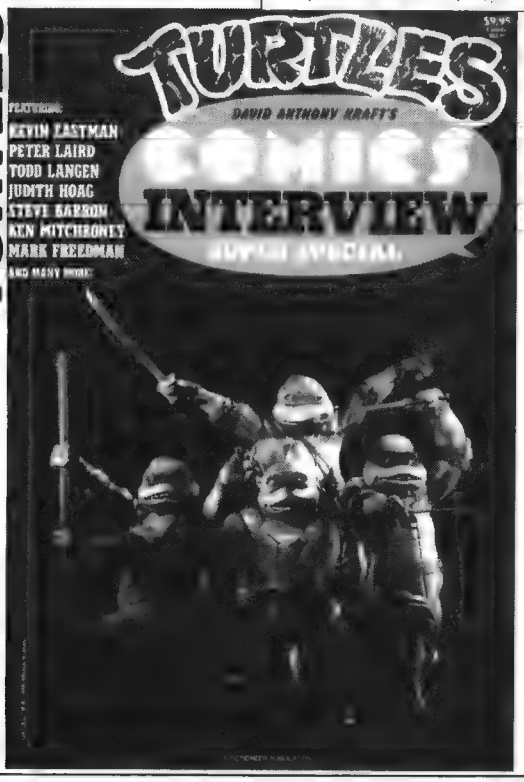

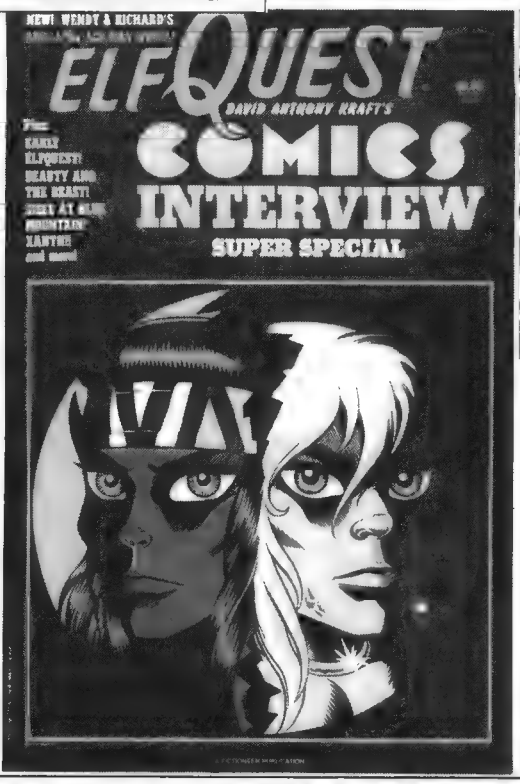

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"You can't make a good film from a lousy script."

Cats prey upon birds — but prefer bats.

them *actually*.

WESLEY: That's right. Well, you know, what's extraordinary from a technological point of view is that now that film images can be scanned digitally and played with and then restored to film resolution, there's no loss of quality. It's not like optical processes, where you keep generating one image from the previous one and losing massive amounts of detail. And also, because of all that, you can see the special effects much quicker than ever before. Almost before your eyes, a director can supervise the creation of an optical effect.

DAN: *So it's sort of like rushes, eh?*

WESLEY: Yeah, exactly. It's pretty much in that time frame, so you're not really constrained that way.

DAN: *So you're not working in the dark with a blue background and hoping it all comes out all right?*

WESLEY: That's right. Or, if you do use a blue screen, there's a whole margin of error now that's huge. There used to be this thing called "blue spill," which is a problem. You could only light the set, when you were working with blue screen, in a really sort of limited way that adversely affected the look of the frame. But now the blue spill itself can be painted out digitally, and so can things like wires that people are suspended on when they're supposed to be flying. So I think just because it's easier, and I think ultimately it will become cheaper, it's inevitable that filmmakers will take advantage of the technology.

DAN: *Sure. Audiences are always ready to be astounded.*

WESLEY: Absolutely. And now I think the potential to astound them is greater than ever.

DAN: *This is off-topic entirely, but I also wanted to ask you about the screenwriter's status in Hollywood —*

WESLEY: Yes?

DAN: *— what do you think of it?*

WESLEY: It's pretty rotten. *(Laughter.)* It's pretty bad. It's not only bad for the political problems of screenwriters, *vis a vis* directors and studios. But, I think, just because of the way movies are made, in Hollywood particularly, the problem with being a screenwriter is that you don't actually make the movie. You know, you're *not* the filmmaker. I sometimes say that the definition of a screenwriter is, "He who doesn't have anything to do with the film."

DAN: *You're a resource.*

WESLEY: It's funny. Even with an original script, when you create the characters and the whole world and the whole story and you feel briefly omnipotent, you show up on the set and you find that there isn't even a spare set of headphones for you to listen to dialogue. And, you know, you try to scrounge one from the sound crew. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *It puts you in your place rather quickly, eh?*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah. You're out of it. You're not as important as, like, the third assistant director, anymore. So that is the problem, and that's, I think, why a lot of writers try to become directors.

DAN: *I've always thought the screenwriter is the great, unsung Hollywood person, you know.*

WESLEY: Oh, well . . . You're not just saying that, are you?

DAN: *No, I actually do.*

WESLEY: *(Laughter.)* No, I happen to think you're right. I don't think that you can make a good film from a lousy script.

DAN: *Being a writer myself, I have a tendency to believe that, you know?* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Yeah, you can't just do it.

DAN: *So it's the skeleton on which any film must be hung, of course. I've interviewed several screenwriters over the years, and it's given me a feeling for that. I always think; "Why always does everyone ignore the screenwriter?" The press, too, largely.*

WESLEY: Um hmm, I don't know why that is the case. You know, there are one or two sort of superstar screenwriters who get acknowledged when their movies open . . .

DAN: *Right. Robert Towne, for example.*

WESLEY: Yeah, and even he seems to be

"Occasionally you get lucky and get to work

fading into a kind of academic obscurity. I mean, now it would be like **Joe Esterhaus. Richard Price** tends to get the press now. There's always a view, it sort of changes. I don't know why. Maybe, in a way, it's appropriate because, as I said, the writer doesn't really make the movie. That's the truth.

DAN: *But first he makes the movie in his head.*

WESLEY: Yeah, he does. But then other people — particularly the director — take it over and, you know, it does become something different.

DAN: *I don't want to denigrate them at all, but auteur, schmauteur, you know?*

WESLEY: I agree. Believe me, I've had enough run-ins with dumb directors who've screwed up my material.

DAN: *And yet, is it rewarding to you?*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah — you mean, other than financially? *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Yeah.*

WESLEY: It is. I mean, what happens is you have to accustom yourself to being grateful for seeing bits and pieces of your work on the screen. Although occasionally you get lucky and, like with me, get to work with **Martin Scorsese**. And all of the sudden, the movie on the screen is not what you had in mind — but it's better. So you get to ride **Scorsese's** coattails into movie glory. And **Tim Burton,** too, he does have a vision. You know, there's a lot of talk about the director's vision. That doesn't mean that every director has one. I think there's about five, maybe, who do. The rest just pretend to. *(Laughter.)* Or they have your vision. They sort of steal it for themselves, or they screw it up.

DAN: *You're a screenwriter who works with actors. I often hear from screenwriters, "I don't want to work with actors."*

WESLEY: Yeah. They can be a real pain. *(Laughter.)* I find it's good to work with them because, if you don't, they'll go off and say their own dialogue, and it'll never be as good as yours — or rarely, anyway. Occasionally, with somebody, again, like **DeNiro,** he will deviate from what I've written and it's great. But most of them, no. If they don't like what you've written and you're not available to rework it with them, they will just walk onto the set and say whatever the hell they want. Boy, you just are horrified.

DAN: *An old friend of mine, Randy Arney, is artistic director at Steppenwolf in Chicago. He says that from the Steppenwolf actor's point of view, the dialogue is just the thing that is, somewhat ineptly, expressing what the character wants. I mean, ineptly in the character's terms . . .*

WESLEY: Right.

DAN: . . . *people don't speak in metaphysical truth, they try to get at what they want. So maybe that's one reason why even some of the best actors don't feel that the particular word is absolutely necessary. Although they wouldn't fuck around with Shakespeare, of course.*

WESLEY: That's true, and then I think certain actors have limitations that they're aware of, and you have to respect them for that. I did a polish once on a film where the lead actor, who's a well-regarded movie star, was having trouble with different lines. And I finally said, "What's the matter with this? Why can't he say this?" And finally the director said, "Well, it's because it's more than three

Batman confronts the Penguin, who vows to destroy Gotham City.

with Martin Scorsese. And Tim Burton, too."

syllables. He doesn't want to say any words that have more than three syllables."

DAN: *He has a hangup about it?*

WESLEY: Well, he just felt that he couldn't do it well. So I thought, "Well, that's kind of embarrassing, but at least he knows it." So once I was armed with that information, I stopped writing words like "homicidal" in the script and I wrote, you know . . .

DAN: *"Killer."* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: "Killer." And then we were fine. So I think it pays to work with actors, even when you don't want to bother. Because you're better off doing it.

DAN: *Yeah. I had done an interview with a TV screenwriter, Jackson Gillis, who did years of PERRY MASON and COLUMBO, which appeared in COMICS INTERVIEW #60. He said, "The actors always want to buttonhole you. 'Can you beef up my dialogue here?'" If you've got 50 people coming at you, I could see how that could be a problem.*

WESLEY: Yeah. I've been on movie locations where basically I'm hiding in my hotel room because I just don't want to be subjected to that. I've had experiences where I try to fly home and, yeah, the actress keeps finding me and demanding that I do another pass at her long speech.

DAN: *So, strangely, although the screenwriter is unsung and ignored, there are points at which they're all after you.*

WESLEY: Oh yeah, we get exploited straight down the line. *(Laughter.)* And everyone else takes credit, in the end.

DAN: *Do you ever look back, though, and think, "It's a fantasy life?" Growing up, surely you must have thought, "Wouldn't this be a fantastic thing to do?"*

WESLEY: Um, I never did, growing up, fantastize about being a screenwriter.

DAN: *No?*

WESLEY: No. I was a musician, and I sort of played in rock bands and stuff like that. I sort of got into this a little later in life. I know it sounds silly, but I was 29 when I wrote my first script, and I think in Hollywood terms that is a little late. These days, you see these screenwriters coming out of USC at 22 and 23, selling spec scripts for half a million dollars. *(Laughter.)* So it wasn't a lifelong fantasy of mine, and in fact I think that might be a good thing. Because I actually got, like, 10 years of real living in there, as opposed to being a product of UCLA or AFI, when my only point of reference is like other movies — which you find a lot of out here.

DAN: *It's a little incestuous?*

WESLEY: Yeah. I worked with directors who are younger than me, and all they know about is the movies on their laser disc collection. And they want to imitate them.

DAN: *And there is a thing called life out there, that art sometimes imitates.*

WESLEY: Yeah. And you don't see a lot of it when you're in the film industry, going from your house in your BMW to the studio.

DAN: *Right. So your fantasy was to be Jagger or somebody?*

WESLEY: Was it **Jagger?** No, I think it was **Dylan.**

DAN: *Dylan, okay. I've got you pegged now.* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: But I wiped out.

DAN: *Do you still play at all?*

WESLEY: Yeah, only in the privacy of my office, when I've, like, hit a snag on a script. I play electric guitar. I think I'm one of the few Jewish country guitar players in L.A. *(Laughter.)* And my wife says, "You know, let's get out of the business, move to Nashville." She always says, "It doesn't matter how old or ugly you are in country." *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Or Branson, Missouri, the up-and-coming place.*

WESLEY: That's right. That's where you open your own theater.

DAN: *Andy Williams is there now.*

WESLEY: Geez. There's a movie there. *(Laughter.)*

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"My original goal was to write BATMAN comics."

MICHAEL USLAN & BEN MELNIKER

When BATMAN hit the screens in 1989, becoming the movie of the year, it was more than a celebration of 50 years worth of character development, more than the return of the character to its original concept (in the sense that now, finally, the world at large will no longer think of Batman strictly in terms of the '60s TV show), and more than the merchandising bonanza of the decade. It was the culmination of ten years of hard work and dedication on the parts of Michael Uslan and Ben Melniker. This is their story . . .

JACK C. HARRIS: *I'm talking with Michael Uslan and Ben Melniker, executive producers of the BATMAN film, and SWAMP THING and other projects. I became aware of Mike when he was teaching a course on comics at Indiana University, the story about it was published in a Sunday supplement magazine, and then I later met Mike at a comics convention in New York City. Then I've also known Mike as a writer for DC Comics, as a lawyer for the film industry, and now as an independent producer. From my viewpoint it seems like when you started back in college you had all of this planned, and you went through this methodically, step by step. I want to know, really, if that's the way it happened.*

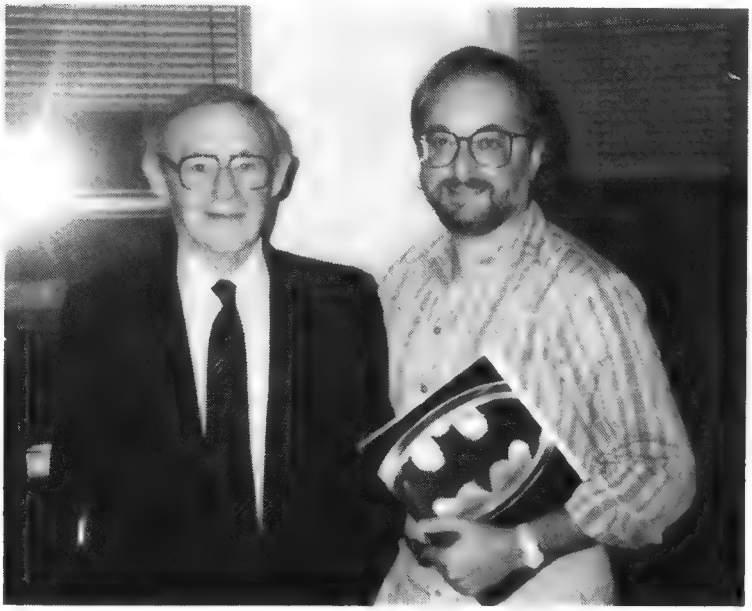
MICHAEL USLAN: Well, I've always been goal directed. My original goal was to write BATMAN comics. That's what I wanted out of life at one point in time; that, to me, would be a dream come true. Batman was always my favorite comic-book hero growing up. That finally happened around 1975. I got to write BATMAN. I then sat back in my apartment one night — this was while I was in law school — and said, "What next? What's the next dream I would like to see come true?"

JACK: *How did you get to write BATMAN?*

MIKE: There we have to back way up on the story. The next part of that dream was, "Gee, I would love to do the definitive 'creature of the night' version of the Batman." "The dark knight" wasn't a term that was popular at that time, it was "creature of the night" — which was he stalks criminals from the shadows, the vigilante as created by **Bob Kane** in 1939. I wanted to bring that to the screen and to do that in a way that would be *true* to the legend, and really make it real. From that moment on I was quite goal directed in those terms — that's where I wanted to go. If you had told me then it would happen four*teen* years later I would have said you were crazy, you know. It couldn't be — either it would *never* happen or it would happen right away, that was the naive outlook that I had at that time.

But to back up, I guess the genesis of this *begins* growing up. My brother Paul, who is four years older than I am, used to just throw his comic books at me all of the time. "Read this. Here, look at this." *He* was a comic-book fan when he was young. According to my folks I learned to read when I was three by reading comic books. As a result, they never got into the '50s McCarthyism paranoia about comic books; they were never influenced by the Werthamites the way a lot of my *friends'* parents were. They saw it as a tool to read, to *spark* the imagination, and the only rule they had about comic books was I couldn't read them exclusively. As long as I read books and other things, comics were fine.

And they let me keep them, collect them. **Bobby Kline,** who is today a genius scientist, partnered with me in my comic-book collection. His folks literally shoveled them into the fireplace in the



Ben Melniker and Michael Uslan discuss their success and future plans.

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"I began teaching a course on comic books, the first

early '60s. I have a distinct vision of his first 20 issues of FANTASTIC FOUR, AMAZING FANTASY #15, HULK #s 1-6, just going up in flames. Sometimes I wake up *screaming* in the middle of the night! *(Laughter.)* But those were the times, a lot of parents treated it that way.

So, I became an avid collector. I put them in plastic bags before they *made* tailor-made plastic bags for comics, and filed them in order, and we finally pushed my parents' car right out of the garage into the driveway. I amassed a collection which peaked at about 30,000 comic books dating back to 1936. There was a place in New Jersey called Collingwood Auction, about six or seven miles from my house, a flea market. This guy, I don't know where he got them, would come in with bundles and bundles of old comics, and he would sell them for a nickel apiece. Bobby and I had a deal with my folks, and every Friday night they would take us to Collingwood Auction after school, as soon as it opened, and that is how I amassed the bulk of my collection. For example, I bought for a nickel apiece the first 20 issues of MAD. I bought SUPERMAN issues numbered in the 40s and 50s. POLICE COMICS #1. CAPTAIN MARVEL, JR. #1. All of the 1950s Atlas comics.

In the past year I went back and that place is still there, run by the *son* of the man I used to buy comics from. I went to buy my son a copy of MOBY DICK, the CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED comic, and I took out my nickel and the guy said that he wanted $22.50. *(Laughter.)* Times have changed. But that's really where it all started, and I became an avid comic-book reader, avid comic-book collector.

When I got into college I wanted to channel the things that I loved in life into work, into *doing* something with them, which at that time was comic books and rock 'n' roll. I became a rock 'n' roll oldies deejay and began running trivia contests on the radio show — I was always a trivia buff — and I began teaching a course on comic books, the first accredited college course on comic books ever taught.

JACK: *This was at Indiana University.*

MIKE: This was Indiana in 1971. Immediately the media jumped all over it. There wasn't a class that went by where we didn't have reporters from all kinds of different magazines — we had everything from PLAYBOY to FAMILY WEEKLY, from CHILDREN'S DIGEST to MODERN MATURITY. And TV cameras as well. And as the *publicity* began to go out, I was invited to do radio and television talk shows — which I did, pushing the idea of comic books as a *legitimate* American artform, indigenous to America. I pushed comics as tools for education. I pushed comics as escapist entertainment for adults as well as kids. These were areas that really had not received very much publicity in the United States before, so it was causing a bit of a sensation.

Having been dragged by The Joker (Nicholson) to the lofty belltower, Vicki Vale

As a *result* of that course, it came to the attention of **Stan Lee** and of **Sol Harrison,** who at that time was a vice president at DC Comics. I needed lecturers for my course, and Stan sent **Gerry Conway** and **Steve Englehart,** and **Sol Harrison** sent **Denny O'Neil.** When **Denny O'Neil** came to stay that weekend, I was thrilled. Denny was my

accredited college course on comic books ever taught."

(Basinger) realizes what it is "to dance with the devil by pale moonlight."

favorite writer in comics. This was at the height of the relevance issues, GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW, the whole social conscience awakening of the American superhero — which was very apropos to what was going on at college campuses at that time — so I was excited as can be.

When he showed up he said, "You know, I lectured somewhere down in Delaware or at some school in Pennsylvania, I can't remember exactly, and there's this guy you've *got* to meet. His name is **Jack Harris."** *(Laughter.)* "And he's just going crazy about this comic-book course. I think he'd like to do something like that." I said, "Great, I'd love to talk to him." And that was our initial contact.

JACK: *That's right. I was teaching a course at the Philadelphia College of Art with three friends — we did it for two semesters — inspired* directly *by the article we'd read about you in the Sunday supplement magazine.*

MIKE: Now, here's the last piece of this story. That same week — I was getting *tons* of mail from all over I get a letter from a guy who said, "I am *desperately* trying to set up a course like this at Hofstra University, could you help me get this thing going? I'd like to know what you're doing and how." That's how I came into contact with **Bob Rozakis.** And then, as the fates would work it, you and Bob and I, along with **Paul Levitz** and **Allan Asherman** and **Carl Gafford,** became the original woodchucks of DC Comics — which was to be, like, the next generation of DC Comics writers, editors, executives; they had this training program.

We all became lifelong friends as a result of that, and had a *terrific* time, learned the industry. And we each in our own way have been involved even to this day in the business. Paul, of course, went right up the ranks of DC, as did Bob in production. You were writing and editing, and I started writing, and then I got involved in the movie side.

JACK: *When you worked at DC, who did you work with directly and what kind of projects did you do besides writing BATMAN?*

MIKE: Well, my summers were spent at DC Comics. My first assignment, they gave me a big basket filled with letters — each of the woodchucks had to take their turn at doing this — and I wound up writing kids back from BATMAN. You know, signing letters "To Timmy, Best Bat-Wishes, Bruce Wayne." I finally came to the end of my ropes when I had to start answering mail for PREZ. *(Laughter.)* That was about it for me in terms of writing letters. But that was the way we all started over there. Then I became involved in three real interesting programs for them.

One was getting comic books into college bookstores, trying to work through the Indiana course and everything that was going on there to convince college bookstore managers that comic books could be taken seriously and that there was a growing college market for them. And we actually made some real good inroads into getting comic books distributed there. The second phase of the project was Edugraphics. Sol had started an educational comic-book

"The Comicmobile will go down in history."

Robert Wuhl as crime reporter Alexander Knox, and Pat Hingle as Police Commissioner Gordon.

series, working with some researchers at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, to use Superman and Batman and Wonder Woman to teach learning-disabled children and children for whom English was a second language how to read, to *motivate* them to read. These were oversized comic books with controlled vocabulary, and the program was eventually sold to the New York Board of Education. It was a *terrific* program, very very worthwhile and rewarding.

The third program was the Comicmobile. *(Laughter.)* The Comicmobile will go down in history as the great and noble experiment. DC rented a van and painted the whole thing with comic-book characters, it was this garish rolling comic-book factory. I went out — followed closely by **Bob Rozakis** who took my place when I had to go back to school — and sold comic books from the van, going up and down streets ringing the bell just like Good Humor sells ice cream. The greatest part of that experiment was the chance to meet kids directly and let them see your wares. They had a menu with all of the different titles, different covers, and we were really able to pinpoint what made certain titles sell and others not. It was *tremendous* direct market research. And that was a fun fun way to spend a summer, a very *unusual* way to spend a summer.

Then I went back to school and began writing for DC from Indiana. The first thing I did was THE SHADOW for Denny, a few issues of that. Then there were mystery stories, war stories, and finally BATMAN — which for me was the ultimate. I also had the opportunity to write THE QUESTION and work with **Alex Toth,** which was a *fabulous* experience, just a great experience. You see, there was a group of fans out of Indiana that were doing a fanzine called CPL and another one called THE CHARLTON BULLSEYE, and that was **Bob Layton** and **Roger Stern** and **John Byrne** and **Roger Slifer** . . . I'm forgetting everybody who was involved in that, but it was a lot of people who later went on and made their marks in comic books.

JACK: *So, how did you move on from that to the next step, which was working for United Artists?*

MIKE: When I graduated law school I went out looking for work, and realized that if I wanted to be in the movie or television business I had two options, New York or L.A. I preferred to be on the creative side, this was really what I wanted. But having no family in the business, *knowing* no one in the business, not having access to a huge sum of money or some hot property that everyone wanted to make into a movie, I quickly learned that doors were not open for me in the way that I wanted. I decided that maybe I could get started on the legal and business end and someday, when no one was looking, sneak in the back door and get onto the creative side. So, for me it was always a means to an end.

The job opportunity that came up was United Artists, which was the only studio then based in New York. I was told it was the best training in the business, that it was *more* than a legal job — you were in charge of all different aspects of business and financial and legal of different projects that were being developed if you went to work at United Artists, just a real broad range of experience. So I went to work at UA. I got to meet the people, I got to learn how films are financed, I got to understand how deals were made, and the various stages of production; and had the opportunity to work on a number of really interesting pictures, including the early ROCKY pictures, RAGING BULL, APOCALYPSE NOW, THE BLACK STALLION, and an interesting little **Roger Corman** film called PIRANHA.

When I first got it I figured, "Oh, some cheap JAWS rip-off." And then the people attached to it, **John Davison** as line producer — who went on to become a top-notch producer in the business — **Joe Dante** the director, **John Sayles** the writer, **Jeff Sheckman** who was one of the producers — who went on to become an executive in the business — and **Paul Bartel.** It was really interesting, the group of people I met as a result of working on that particular project.

I worked early on SHEENA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE while it was still at UA. It had come over to UA in turnaround from Universal where it was a vehicle for **Raquel Welch** initially. Then at UA they talked about everyone who had ever been or ever would be a Charlie's Angel. *(Laughter.)* And finally it wound up over at Columbia. It was a great four years at UA; I learned an incredible amount and couldn't be doing

"I worked on SHEENA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE."

Michael Gough as Bruce Wayne's faithful butler Alfred, and Billy Dee Williams as District Attorney Harvey Dent.

what I'm doing today if it hadn't been for that.

One of the great breaks in my life came when I met *another* young lawyer working at UA by the name of **Charles Melniker.** After I had been at UA for a few years and I knew I wanted to get out and produce, and I wanted to do this BATMAN movie that had been simmering for a lot of years, my initial reception from DC Comics was, "Yes, the rights are available; we trust you that you would turn this into a serious BATMAN, not do a rehash of the '60s thing; and we'd be willing to talk." And I knew I needed somebody who could really go in and not only negotiate out an agreement like that, but who had been through everything and knew how to mount a production.

So, I had been reading about **Ben Melniker** in VARIETY — it seemed like *every* day he was on the front page at that time, setting motion picture history. He had been called in on a project called WINTER KILLS — Ben can speak more in detail about that. But I said, "How do I get to this guy?" I was talking to Charles and he said, "Well, why don't you go over and see my father?" *(Laughter.)* And I said, "Will he grant me an audience?" To me this was like going to meet *the Pope.*

Charles set it up, and I went over and met Ben over at the M-G-M Building, and presented him my whole idea on BATMAN — the whole history of the character, how I saw it, why it was *so* important to do it *seriously* as this "creature of the night" rather than anything campy. I left Ben with a ton of material, and a day or two later he called back. I went by on my lunch hour and he said that from a studio standpoint this was a presold property, a property that generations have come into contact with, that due to its foreign sales it's known worldwide, the kind of thing that has not only great upside potential but as a result of this built-in audience had a limited downside. He said, "I would *love* to get involved with you in this, I think we can make it go." That began our association, which then resulted in a six-month negotiation with DC Comics, Warner Publishing — and on 3 October 1979 we formed Batfilm Productions, Inc. and signed the agreement with DC Comics optioning the rights to BATMAN. The following July I left UA officially and Ben and I began working together full-time.

JACK: *Let's switch over to Ben, and let me have a little bit of your background. I know you were with M-G-M for quite some time, but how did it all lead up to Batfilms from your side?*

BEN MELNIKER: Well, I served with M-G-M for 30 years in various capacities. I started as a young lawyer and then became vice president and general counsellor, when all of the business affairs and legal reported to me. After that there were some corporate changes. **Edgar Broffman** and his interests came in and they thought they wanted their interests protected in a certain way and *insisted* that I become executive vice president, at which time all of the operating divisions of the company were reporting to me.

Shortly thereafter, **Kerkorian** made a tender offer for the company and took control, and decided (A) to move the company to the west coast, and (B) to stop making motion pictures except for one or two films a year. Neither of those two goals were attractive to me. I did not want to leave New York where I have been based for so many years; and there was no fun or desire for me to be part of a company that would be mainly dedicated to gambling, the building of gambling casinos. Shortly after that, in fact, M-G-M started the M-G-M Grand casino and the casino in Reno, Nevada. So I left in the early '70s.

I thereafter was involved in the production and financing, the *arrangement* for the financing, of several motion pictures. One was a picture called MITCHELL with **Joe Don Baker** and **Linda Evans** and others. Another was a picture called SHOOT with **Cliff Robertson** and **Ernie Borgnine** and others. And then I had what was then a very important project called WINTER KILLS which had a budget of about $6.5 million — which today would be probably $25 million — with a *host* of stars. Certain other producers *started* the picture and fell on their face because they ran out of financing, and the picture closed down. It was a *major* motion picture with **Elizabeth Taylor, Jeff Bridges, John Huston, Tony Perkins,** a host of others, and they ran out of money!

The picture had a twelve-week schedule and at the end of eleven weeks it

"The major studios were not interested in BATMAN."

Jerry Hall as gangland moll Alicia, and Jack Palance as crimelord Carl Grissom.

closed up, all of the actors left, etcetera. This never happened in the history of motion pictures before. Somebody involved came to me and asked what I could do. Well, to make a long story short, for the first time in the history of the motion picture business, and never since, a single picture was put in chapter eleven in order to keep all of the creditors at bay. I then arranged a rather complicated plan which involved the IRS and the California Tax Commission and about 400 creditors, including AFL because they have all of the trade unions out there, the guilds, etcetera. We put the picture together and it was finished; that took up some time.

It was at or about the end of that project that *this* came up, this BATMAN project came up, and it became a long labor of love. After we signed the rights agreement, the major studios were not interested in doing it. They did not have the *vision* to see that this could be a major motion picture! They thought it would be a replica or just another version of the TV shows, which did not appeal to them as a major motion picture. I talked to Michael and I told him that I knew **Peter Guber,** having dealt with him when I was at M-G-M, and I thought that he would fit into it. Michael agreed with that wholeheartedly. I then called Peter, arranged a date, and Michael and I flew out to the coast, and within three days we concluded the agreement with him.

Shortly thereafter **Tom Mankiewicz** was engaged as scriptwriter on a very large deal, and it took him about a year, if not longer, to do the script. Michael worked very closely with him, we had a number of meetings with him, and so it went on from step to step. Finally **Tim Burton** came into the picture about 1985 or 1986 and things got in hand quickly and it moved, and the picture started shooting in 1988.

MIKE: 10 October 1988. Just to back up for a couple of minutes, Ben doesn't like to talk about himself. *(Laughter.)* But I just wanted to mention a few things. Not only was he an executive vice president of M-G-M, he was the chairman of their film selection committee at a time when M-G-M was on top of the world, a member of the board, their representative to the MPAA, the Motion Picture Association of America. He negotiated the landmark Paramount consent decree which required companies to divest themselves of their theaters; one of the great antitrust suits of all time, he was actually negotiating with the Attorney General.

He is a legend in the business. That whole aura, the whole legend of **Ben Melniker,** was really what drove me to try to meet him; and to try to get his interest in this project, to get things rolling. I knew if I could get somebody of *that* calibre interested that no matter what would happen this BATMAN picture would come to pass. And I was absolutely right about that.

JACK: *Let me ask you something about that. Before Michael walked in with his armload of material, what was your familiarity with the character of Batman?*

BEN: I must admit, very slight. During that entire period of the '60s I was just totally *obsessed* with my business at M-G-M. M-G-M was involved in a number of proxy fights, so we really had two very important things going on at M-G-M. One was running the business, and that was more than enough for one job, for one person to handle. And in *addition* to that, because we had such a rich library, because we were the Tiffany of the business, many people tried to come in and take us over. We had talks with CBS with respect to a merger. We had talks with ABC. We even had talks with Union Pacific.

They were just beating down our door. We finally made certain arrangements and people came on our board, and they were like moles in there trying to take over. The position of vice president and general counsel puts one in the spot of supervising the outside legal, the outside publicity, the outside public relation forces, in a situation like that. And much time was spent in Washington and so forth, it was an all-absorbing thing.

MIKE: Talk about the challenge you had on getting DOCTOR ZHIVAGO.

BEN: Of course, every important project raised its own *unique* problems. When it came to buying the rights for DOCTOR ZHIVAGO, they were held by **Feltroneli,** the Italian publisher, who acquired them from **Pasternak.** That contract was accomplished before we stepped into the picture. **Carlo Ponti** came into our office and the president and I sat with him, and he said he had gotten the interest of **Robert Bolt** and **David Lean** in DOCTOR ZHIVAGO. And, of course, we felt that with **David Lean's** record, never

"BATMAN II is in the planning stages."

having made a picture that did not make money, and with **Robert Bolt**, probably *the* outstanding English writer of the time, that it was a very desirable project.

On the other hand, on our board of directors, which had to approve this deal, there were some very important persons, including **Bennett Cerf. Bennett Cerf** was very influential, and he said he was very much opposed to the deal. He said, "People are going to think DOCTOR ZHIVAGO is a *medical* book. How are you going to dissuade them?" Of course we explained to him, "My God, with all of the publicity about it having won the prizes that it did and so forth, the people *know!*" Word of mouth is incredible in this business.

In *addition* to all of that, there was a provision in the contract that said the picture had to carry out the spirit of the book. That gave **Bennett Cerf** and others an easy handle to say, "What a *risk* M-G-M would be taking!" If we made the picture and then later on we had a lawsuit or an injunction from the rights owner, from the Feltroneli Publishing Company, we'd run a heavy risk. The budget of the picture was $12 million at the time — it would be probably $40 million to $50 million in today's dollars.

I made a suggestion to our management that we should take the leading English scholar at Oxford, the leading Russian scholar at Oxford, and the same two kinds of scholars at Cambridge, and have them analyze and read the book, have them analyze and read the screenplay. If they would give us affidavits that the screenplay carried out the spirit of the book, that it *did* carry out the spirit of the book, I could not conceive of any court ever saying that we didn't do what we were supposed to do. And these people, except for getting an honorarium — I think we paid each of them $200 just as a way of having consideration, a nominal honorarium — they were totally dispassionate about it. What greater care could one take! I went over there with one of my assistants, to Oxford, to Cambridge, met the people, did all of that, and we got approvals on everything.

And I also added, to the board, "**David Lean** is the preeminent director in the business. If we took the screenplay — which would get the stamp of approval from these four scholars — and put it in the hands of **David Lean,** we just would not have anything to worry about." And nothing could have gone more smoothly than that whole operation. The picture was done. And in 1968

BATMAN director Tim Burton on the Warner Brothers set of the same name.

"If we only deal with the Joker, Penguin, Catwoman,

Producers of the BATMAN movie, Jon Peters and Peter Guber.

— the picture came out in the early '60s — by 1968 **Carlo Ponti** had $17 million in his pocket, **David Lean** had $17 million in his pocket, and M-G-M had $34 million in its coffers, as pure *profit*. Besides the money M-G-M made, DOCTOR ZHIVAGO now is one of the great classics in the motion picture industry.

JACK: *Did that become a standard practice in contracts?*

BEN: About spirit?

JACK: *Yeah.*

BEN: Absolutely not. That was because that book was *unique*. It was, as you remember — maybe you don't remember, you may be too young — it was a celebrated book. **Pasternak** won a world renowned prize with the book — I forget, was it Pulitzer or Nobel? And then there was the whole question of whether he was in jail or whether he was alive or not alive. He sold it to **Feltroneli,** but **Feltroneli,** it turned out, the leading publisher in Italy, was a communist. But everything was special about it; it was a *unique* situation.

JACK: *Now, let me ask you . . . We're mainly concerned about the BATMAN projects, but of course this is not your only area of interest. We're familiar with the two SWAMP THING films and various other projects, and I would like to hear about some of the other ones besides BATMAN. The first SWAMP THING film came out before BATMAN . . . the second one came out before BATMAN, too, didn't it?*

MIKE: Yeah, before BATMAN.

JACK: *So, your original association was due to BATMAN, but how did some of these other projects come about?*

MIKE: We knew BATMAN would take a little while. *(Laughter.)*

BEN: Incidentally — let me interrupt — I happen to be working on a deal here, this is a Warner *book* deal that will eventuate in a picture. I'm not giving you the subject matter. *(Reads.)* Warner and the proprietor — Batfilms Productions is the proprietor — agree that the book, the contents thereof, and the terms of this agreement shall remain confidential until such time as it is mutually agreed to release notice for the book. It is further agreed that all publicity and interviews, and any material contained in the book, shall be coordinated through Warner.

Now, *most* often — for instance, we have a deal with the Disney Channel that says the same thing — we have a deal with the USA Network that says the same thing. I'm very concerned about Disney because we got a notice from them. Now, we could make an argument here, get into a legal argument, that in talking to you — of course, if we tell you about this book then we're violating this — but I didn't say what it is. I'm pointing out that this contract stipulates that you cannot even *talk* about certain projects at a certain point in time unless everyone agrees on it.

MIKE: Yeah, but he can be as ambiguous and as vague as he wants right now, he's not violating the contract.

BEN: I'm not saying what the content is. But there are *certain* things we can talk about. Let's say we have now in active development . . . how many projects?

MIKE: Twenty.

BEN: Twenty projects in active development.

JACK: *Which ones can you mention? And specifically, what can you tell us about the next BATMAN film?*

MIKE: BATMAN II is in the planning stages, and there will be BATMAN films to come. One of the *great* things that we have going for us in terms of future BATMAN movies is the meat and potatoes of an ongoing series that would continue to be unique and strong and not simply a rehashed formula — is the villains.

BEN: And by series you mean pictures.

MIKE: Sequels. Batman has the best super-villains in history, that's one of the reasons he's been around *so* successfully for 50 years. If we only deal with the

Two-Face, you've got enough for half-a-dozen movies."

HE'LL ROAST IN HELL FIRST!
THE QUESTION!! GET 'IM -
GAAAH! HE AIN'T GOT NO FACE!!
NOT UNTIL THE COURTS CLOSE THE LOOPHOLES IN PROSECUTION AND PLEA-BARGAINING LAWS, WILL AMERICANS BE SAFE FROM PUNKS LIKE YOU - !!

THE QUESTION . . . created by Steve Ditko, plot by Roger Stern, written by Michael Uslan, art by Alex Toth [from CHARLTON BULLSEYE #5].

first-stringers, the Joker, the Penguin, the Catwoman, Two-Face, the Riddler, you've got enough there for half a dozen movies — *just* with the first-stringers.

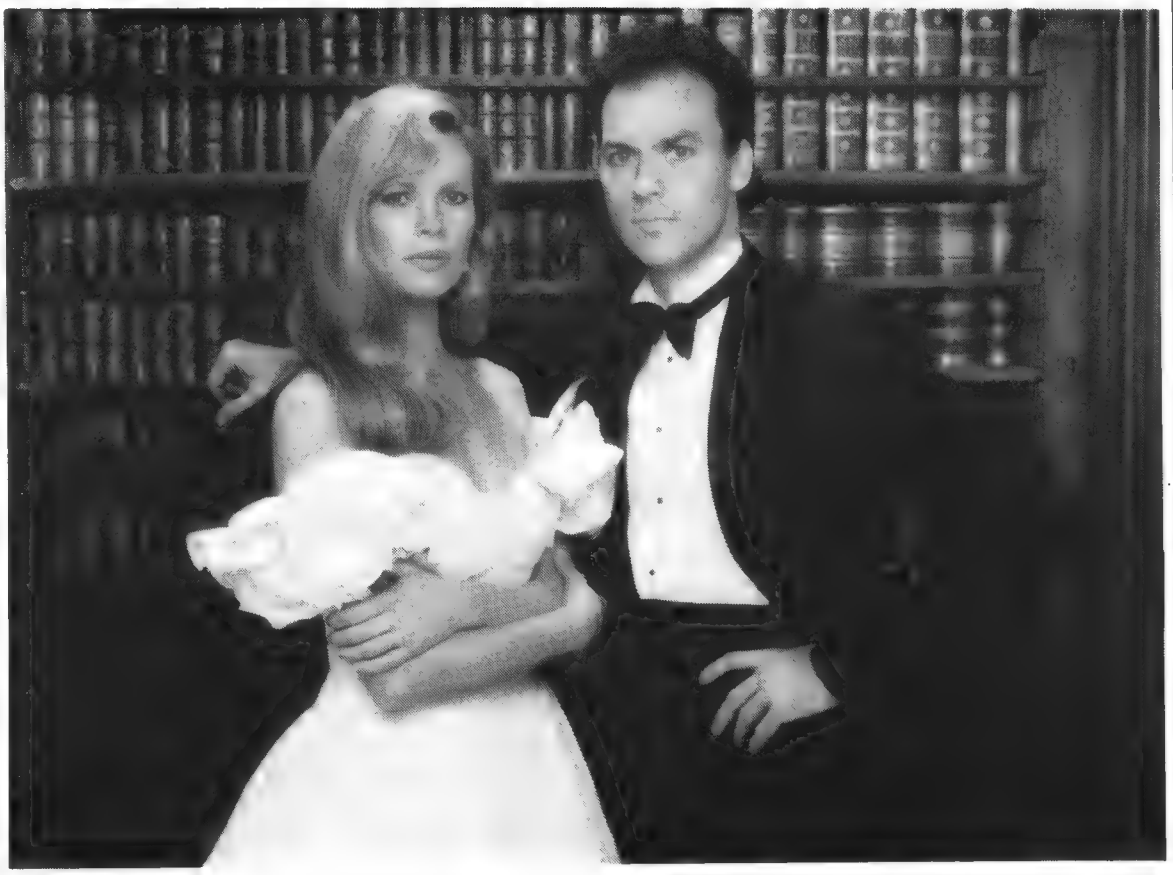
And if you begin to look beyond that, to some *wonderful* villains like Ra's Al Ghul, the Scarecrow, Man-Bat, there's just so much great and different material there. It's wonderful. Robin has yet to be dealt with. We have plenty to do in the future in BATMAN, and we look forward to it with great excitement. We believe that the world is hooked, the world will tune in and follow the adventures of **Bob Kane's** original Batman. I like that a lot.

In terms of projects beyond that — *(Sirens blare from streets outside.)* — we now are working on a theatrical feature called KIDD. It's based on **Tom Selitson's** novel about the search for **Captain Kidd's** buried treasure in modern day New York City. It is New York City at its darkest and most menacing. It's an urban version of RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, once you get into the actual search for the treasure. We're very excited about that project. *(Sirens fade.)*

JACK: *How did you organize those sirens when you started talking about that?*

MIKE: We have many special effects at our fingertips. *(Laughter.)* Our biggest project in the immediate future is MONOPOLY: THE MOVIE. Ben and I bought the rights from Parker Brothers to the board game, for motion pictures, and are working on a *very* unique story. The first thing people ask us is, "What the *hell* are you going to do with *that?*" Their expectation level is wide open, they just have no concept. The follow-up question is, "Is it going to be anything like the movie CLUE?" We're very lucky to be in a position with MONOPOLY where we are beginning with virtually no restrictions. We have the ability to come

"We have in the works SWAMP THING."



Kim Basinger [Vicki Vale] and Michael Keaton [Bruce Wayne, Batman].

up with our own story and our own characters, whereas CLUE was limited to six characters in six rooms in one house. So, we're real excited about it, and expect to shoot in Atlantic City where all of the properties on the board game come from.

JACK: *I'd like to be an extra.*

MIKE: Would you like to be the boot or the iron? *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *No, I want to be the lead pipe.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: We are working on a feature film tentatively called GANGBUSTERS, which is a gangster picture that we would like to see done as a gritty 1930s Warner Bros. gangster picture. It's written by **Joe Gores,** who is one of the top mystery/detective novelists in the country — and wrote HAMMETT and some other films. We're excited about that project. We're working on a new SGT. PRESTON OF THE YUKON television series, which is moving forward right now — a modernized version of SGT. PRESTON.

We have in the works a SWAMP THING series — *two* SWAMP THING series, actually, that will run simultaneously with each other; a Saturday morning cartoon series and a live-action series. The live-action one would be approached in a much more serious tone than the movies have been, while the animated would cater more directly to the kids. We are doing a movie of the week for the USA Network, with **Heather Locklear,** about **Edgar Allan Poe**, called THE TELL-TALE HOUSE.

And we have a number of other projects in the works. Generally, we have four comics related projects that I can't quite talk about yet, one of which is a very famous old pulp hero, and three of which are famous ongoing comic-book characters. That really sums up what we're working on.

BEN: There's FANTASTIC VOYAGE II.

MIKE: FANTASTIC VOYAGE II is an incredible deal based on the book by **Isaac Asimov,** which Ben put together.

BEN: That was a deal made with Doubleday with a very sizeable advance. **Isaac Asimov** was so eager to do that that we made an arrangement whereby he would get his share of the publishing rights but we end up owning all of the rights other than the publishing rights. So we are totally free to do anything in the way of motion pictures, television, etcetera. And we are now in the process of negotiating a motion picture project based on the book.

This book is *not* a sequel to the Fox picture, it's totally new characters and a totally different story. But it *does* have the miniaturization at the core of it. And we contemplate that there will be a series of books, and a series of motion picture and/or television projects emanating from each of the books. We think — again, relying on presold properties — we think FANTASTIC VOYAGE has a tremendous recognizable value out in the marketplace.

JACK: *FANTASTIC VOYAGE, the original movie, it was sort of the first of the more sophisticated science-fiction things that led to the public's acceptance of such things as 2001. Science fiction seems to have grown up starting with that movie.*

MIKE: I think that might have been a first step, and I think 2001 was the zenith that broke it all wide open, absolutely.

"I dealt with Stanley Kubrick. He is a bit of a genius."

That, to me, was the seminal movie, 2001.

BEN: And that brings back memories to me because it was an M-G-M picture. I dealt with **Stanley Kubrick** extensively on that picture. He is a bit of a genius but not the easiest person in the world to work with. It's not because of his personality, it's because of his total artistry and dedication, which I suppose is a concomitant of that, being difficult to get along with. But it was a great *experience*. And ever there was a *prestige* picture and a *successful* picture rolled into one, that is it. We did a picture like DIRTY DOZEN more or less about that time that was highly successful, but I wouldn't call it exactly a prestige picture — but I'm not in any way saying I wouldn't like to have a *score* of DIRTY DOZEN pictures.

JACK: *2001 came out right when I went into the Army.*

BEN: Where were you in the Army at that time?

JACK: *I was in Germany, spent two years in Germany. It was during the Vietnam War, but I was with the NATO forces in Germany.*

BEN: Did you learn German?

JACK: *I could read the signs and the menus.* (Laughter.) *And I've forgotten it since. I had a three-day weekend once and they showed 2001 four shows a day at the movie theaters on the Army bases, and out of those twelve showings I sat through it nine times.*

BEN: Was that picture popular among soldiers?

JACK: *Oh, yeah, lines around the theater.*

MIKE: I was in high school and the thing to do was go see 2001.

BEN: At the beginning it wasn't that highly successful; it took a *long* time for word of mouth to build up.

JACK: *I was thrilled by it. At the same time — talking about the science-fiction films getting a momentum at that point — PLANET OF THE APES came out in the late '60s, too. I always lump those three together, PLANET OF THE APES and FANTASTIC VOYAGE and 2001, as being* intelligently *produced and well written science-fiction films.*

MIKE: Kim Hunter was in PLANET OF THE APES and we had the pleasure of working with Kim on THREE SOVEREIGNS FOR SARAH. I just couldn't quite identify her. *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *Talk a little bit about THREE SOVEREIGNS FOR SARAH, because I don't think a lot of people are familiar with it.*

MIKE: Well, one of my real interests in life is history — I'm a history major from college, *love* history. Ben and I, one day, had a writer in our office who explained he was from the Boston area and he was working on, had been spending two years researching, the Salem witch trials of 1692, working with the two primary historical experts on the subject. And they had uncovered the original trial transcripts and the depositions sitting in the basement of a museum up in the Salem area.

He was just absolutely enthralled by the *true* story of the witch trials, what *really* happened there, which they had been able to piece together. And he wanted to know if we would be interested in getting involved in helping get it set up, financed — and we basically said we needed a script to do it, but if he was willing to speculate and write the script then we would speculate with our time to get it set up. Three months later he came walking into our offices with the best script I had ever read — *completely* historically accurate.

We then set about on an eighteen-month task to raise the money for this and to get it set up; ultimately, getting it set as a mini-series for PBS on THE AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE series,

"Out of 107 reviews from all around the

which is very prestigious; and then getting a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and finally bringing in Goldcrest Films to distribute it foreign. We then produced this mini-series with **Vanessa Redgrave, Patrick McGoohan, Kim Hunter, Phyllis Thaxter,** an absolutely all-star cast.

BEN: It took some very ingenious type of approach to the business, to the financing, because we had a limited budget with PBS there. The picture — three hours, right.

MIKE: Three hours.

BEN: The picture looks as if it cost five million.

MIKE: Seven, eight.

BEN: And yet it was done on a budget of $1.5 million. There were, really, principally three reasons for it. First, it was done as an independent. Doing it as an independent feature you don't do it with the splash and waste, if you will, that some of the studios do.

But more importantly, we got all of the actors to work for scale because of the historical importance of this piece. In other words, somebody that may be getting $200,000 normally would be getting maybe five percent of that, because they're working on scale. Now, **Vanessa Redgrave,** you just can't say to her, "Work for scale." And yet we had to work around that so we were truthful to everybody, that everybody *including* Vanessa worked on scale — but there was a way to give her certain *other* considerations that did not cut across that representation to the other people. But unless all of the actors worked on it for scale, this thing could not have been done.

And the third reason it was done is that we were very fortunate in being able to get all of those historically accurate costumes and sets, locations, free of charge. We didn't have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in advance and keep a crew on while all that was going on. Those are the three main reasons we were able to do it.

MIKE: Museums, historical societies, the citizenry, were so *thrilled* to have somebody coming in and doing the *true* story of the Salem witch trials, rather than some *horror* movie, that they went all out to support us. And the series has absolutely been heralded. Out of 107 reviews that came in from all around the country, we got 105 raves — which isn't bad. It really for the first time explained what the witch trials were all about, and why. And it's an important lesson. People should know so history doesn't repeat itself over and over again, which it constantly seems to do. So, we were really really pleased with that.

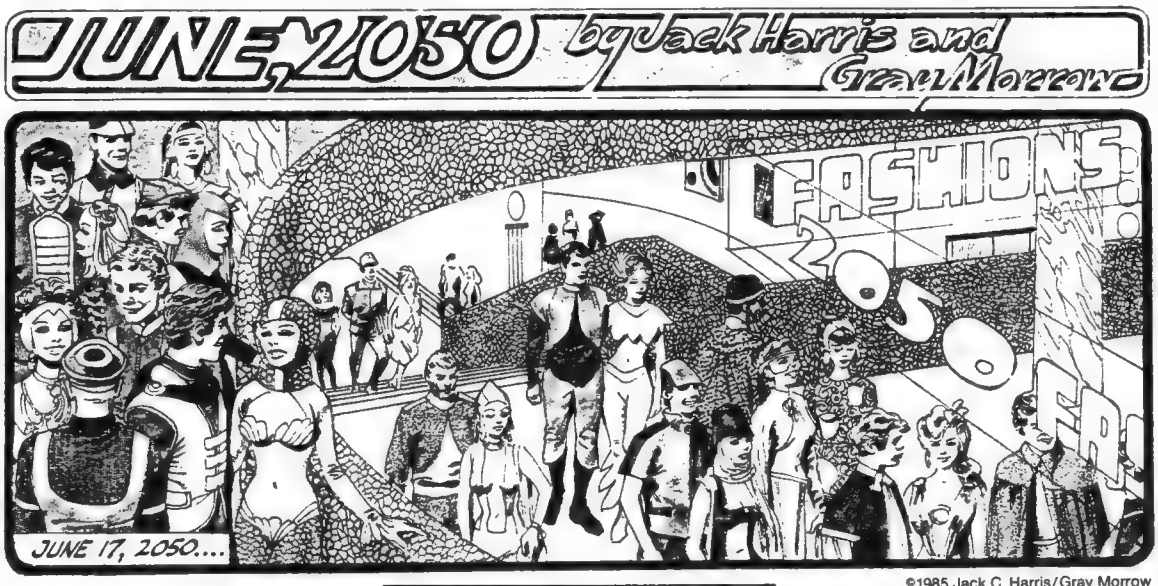
Plus, it gave me the chance to meet **Patrick McGoohan.** *(Laughter.)* I am a PRISONER fan to the nth degree. The first day Patrick was on the set I went up to him and said, "Are you free for dinner?" He said sure. I said, "I'm taking you to the best place in Salem, but in exchange you're going to sit there with me for a couple of hours and I'm going to tell you what I think THE PRISONER was all about." *(Laughter.)* "The whole thing, man, and you're going to tell me if I'm right or wrong." He said, "It's a deal."

We went out for dinner, and I was *so* excited to be sitting there with him, and I said, "First of all, he *was* John Drake. Just like it says in the theme song, they gave him a number and took away his name — that's it, he went and became Number Six. That's just for starters, I'm sure about that much." He said, "I don't think so." *(Laughter.)* He said, "First of all, that *horrible* theme song was not part of the original British series, they did that when it came over to America. And I never thought of Number Six as having been a secret agent, I always thought of him as being a scientist." And I said, "Whoa!" *(Laughter.)* That just destroyed every domino that I had going from the beginning to the end — and it was just a wonderful wonderful evening.

JACK: *Now, I see — especially today in the comics industry — that a lot of times the spirit is* lost, *and altered for all time sometimes.*

MIKE: It often depends on the approach you're taking. We would agree in any kind of thing not to denigrate or disparage a character. But there are some points . . . let's take, for example, SWAMP THING II, which was consciously made to appeal to a market that had surfaced and been targeted from the results of the first SWAMP THING and other things that had been done. And that was kids. Kids loved the first SWAMP THING. Kids *loved* it! And we made a movie targeted for kids. The comic book, obviously, is now targeted exclusively for *adults.* We could not do *that* interpretation of the character to

The teaming of Jack C. Harris, our interviewer, and Gray Morrow, from NATIONAL LAMPOON.



©1985 Jack C. Harris/Gray Morrow

country, we got 105 raves — which isn't bad."

This was the masthead for an article Mike wrote for DC's old AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS, circa 1975.

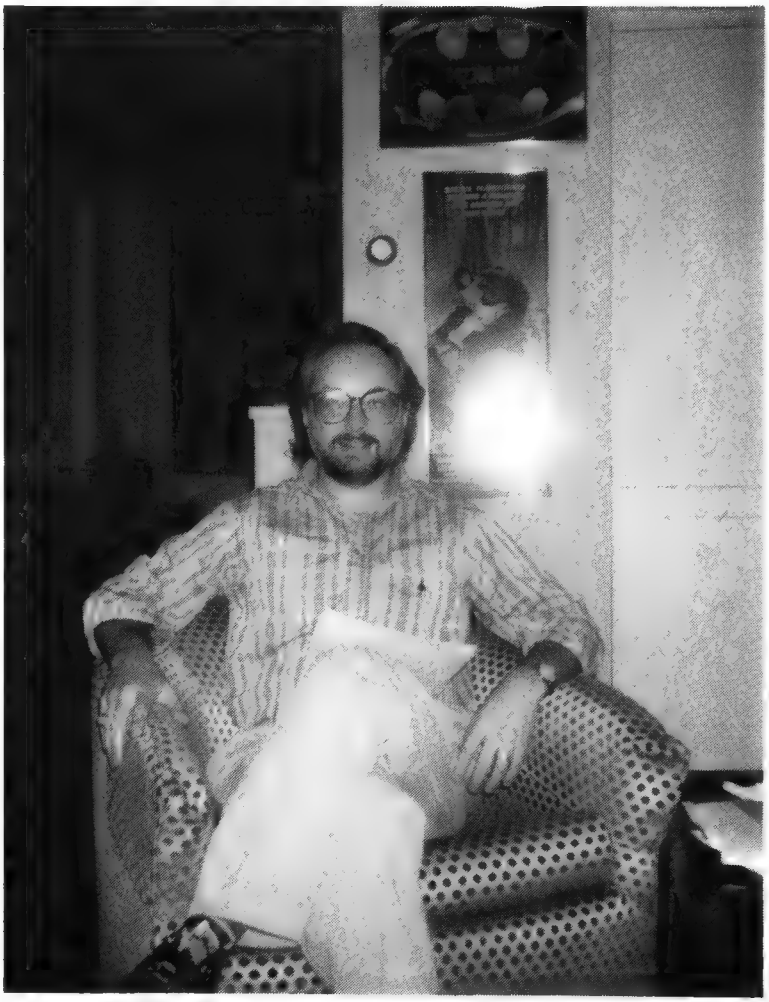
CHUCKIN' IT

reach *our* audience. We needed to do this funny fairy tale kind of approach which was more akin to a traditional beauty and the beast kind of thing, rather than the psychological horror and, as DC called it, sophisticated suspense, in SWAMP THING II.

So, sometimes it depends upon what audience you're trying to reach. On the other hand, with BATMAN going for the *broadest* audience, going for an adult audience, you can not only adhere to the concept of Batman as the "creature of the night" but go as far in *that* range as you want to go, and ignore some of the things which had been done in the intervening years which took away from that, which diluted the character. You really have two different ends of the spectrum depending upon the audience that you want to reach.

We have a project coming up, FISH POLICE, which is an animated series that we want to work like a ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE cartoon. We want the kids to really enjoy it, because it is *bizarre,* it is *unique;* but we want the parents to really enjoy it as well for things that are presented there. And we now have an arrangement with **Gary Wolfe,** who created ROGER RABBIT. Gary, who was able to create this believable alternate universe known as Toontown, is now doing that with our Fishworld, and the results are just terrific. So that's a project we're really excited about that we hope will reach a broader audience.

We did an animated TV series, DINOSAUCERS, which is now out in 65 half-hours and runs Monday through Friday mornings on the Family channel. With DINOSAUCERS, too, while it's *basically* for kids, we wanted to make it painless for adults to sit and watch with their kids. So we've done a lot of movie parodies, for example. We did "The Maltese Pterodactyl" and "Aloe and Costego Meet the Abominable Snow-man" and "We're Off to See the Lizard." *(Laughter.)* There were a lot of things that we did — thanks largely to our story editor **Diane Duane,** who I think is the leading fantasy novelist right now — for adults. So, my point is just that you can interpret comics many different ways depending on your audience.



JACK: *You started out talking about being goal directed. What's your next goal?*

MIKE: The next goal is to have a lot of fun in what we do. I don't think that you need to go out and top yourself, that we need to worry about how we're going to top BATMAN, or being afraid of doing anything because it might not top it. That's not a factor. For us it's what's going to be fun, what we're going to enjoy doing, what projects we have a passion for and truly would love to do, and what people we want to work with. I think those factors will make for an exciting second decade for Batfilms, which begins 3 October 1989. *(Laughter.)*

We think that the future looks just terrific. We have some more projects dealing with subject matters that we love; including, for me, comic books, rock 'n' roll, history, and some other things that are *completely* off the wall, and some other things that are quite serious. There are some true stories that we think have, really, award winning potential.

"We figured we were making an episodic TV series that

YVONNE CRAIG

I TRIED JUDO -- THE GENTLE WAY -- BEFORE! NOW, I KNOW BETTER! JU-JITSU'S NASTIER
NICE MOVE, LADY! WE'LL FINISH THE JOB--
YEAH. I ONLY WISH I WAS WEARING MY FOOTBALL SHOES!
BEFORE YOU KICK HANK, YOU'LL HAVE TO BOOT ME!
BUT A LOT MORE EFFECTIVE!

Batgirl, from DETECTIVE COMICS #400, 1970. The art is by Gil Kane & Vince Colletta (story: Denny O'Neil).

In the 1960s, young girls had two role models on television: Marlo Thomas's THAT GIRL, an independent career woman who managed to maintain her identity in the man's working world, and Yvonne Craig's BATGIRL, an independent career woman who managed to maintain a double identity, and was able to do anything Batman did — in high heels! She was also TV's first super heroine, predating Lynda Carter's Wonder Woman by ten years.

On the set of her return to acting, a thriller called SAY BYE-BYE, Craig is revered. "Screen Scream Queen" Linnea Quigley raves, "I love Batgirl. I grew up watching her — she's cool!" Yvonne Craig takes a break from filming to talk about her bat-heritage.

PAT JANKIEWICZ: *Where have you been?*

YVONNE CRAIG: After I finished BATMAN, I did a lot of episodic TV, which is what I'd been doing prior to BATMAN, and I decided as parts were not coming as often as I wanted them to, I should find a more sensible way of making a living in the real estate business, which is *not* a more sensible way of making a living! *(Laughter.)*

My lack of roles had nothing to do with my role as Batgirl; there was no stigma to my having been Batgirl whatsoever. I like the real estate business; once you get your real estate license you don't want to give it up because you can buy and sell real estate anywhere in Southern California, which can come in handy!

PAT: *Does your celebrity status help, i.e., buying a house from Batgirl?*

YVONNE: I don't know — the other day somebody said to me, "We were considering three different brokers. Essen-

All artwork accompanying this interview is ©1989 DC Comics, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

would be over when it was over, and never rerun again."

After & before: our favorite female "BAT" person, Yvonne . . . 1989 & 1966.

tially, you all do the same thing, but I decided that this was a job for Batgirl!" *(Laughter.)* It turned out I had the listing six months and I never could sell it! I finally went to them and said, "I have done everything short of setting my hair on fire and running naked through the streets screaming 'Buy this property!'" As it turned out, hiring Batgirl for that particular property was not a good idea for them. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *What surprises you the most about BATMAN?*

YVONNE: Essentially, what blows me away is that people are still watching it 20 years after it was done! I mean, we didn't think we were making GONE WITH THE WIND, we figured we were making an episodic TV series that would be over when it was over, and never rerun again, or rerun for only a brief period of time.

They were telling me the other day that apparently BATMAN never stopped being rerun somewhere in the world in the last 20 years — now, that's mind-boggling to me!

PAT: *Were Adam West (Batman) and Burt Ward (Robin) hard to get along with?*

YVONNE: Not for me, they weren't. I had heard some fairly lurid horror stories about both of them, but by the time I got on the set they were fine. Burt, particularly, was always on the set on time, knew his lines, did his job and when finished, went back to his dressing room and played chess with some pal, a stand-in.

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"I love Vincent Price! He was my favorite villain."

BATGIRL HAS TRACED THE ABOVE-GROUND COURSE OF THE BAT TUNNEL TO STATELY WAYNE MANOR...
CAN MILLIONAIRE BRUCE WAYNE BE BATMAN? IT SEEMS INCREDIBLE, YET--
BOB KANE
WAYNE MANOR
-- BRUCE HAS A YOUNG WARD NAMED DICK GRAYSON WHO COULD VERY WELL BE ROBIN!
8/24
BUT BATMAN AND ROBIN ARE DEAD...WHICH MEANS THAT BRUCE AND DICK WOULD BE DEAD, TOO...AND THERE'S CERTAINLY NO SIGN OF LIFE IN THE HOUSE!

From a short-lived BATGIRL newspaper strip, 8/24/67

I saw Burt and Adam the other day — we're doing BATMAN wraparounds, and they're looking wonderfully fit. In retrospect, Burt had the hardest job of all of us, because he was the person who was not 15 years old trying to play a 15-year-old. That's difficult, because in repose, 15-year-olds are still moving, while in repose, anyone over 20 sits and kind of settles, so it's hard to keep up that 15-year-old energy when you're no longer 15.

PAT: *How were the other cast members?*

YVONNE: Alan Napier (Alfred) was a dream! Alan and I both had dogs. Alan's little dog was named Tippy and my dog was named Sebastian, an adorable Yorkshire terrier. My little yorky used to walk in every morning, lift his leg on the Batcave, and proceed to my dressing room —

PAT: *Your dog urinated on the Batcave?*

YVONNE: Yes! Every morning without fail. It was his job! *(Laughter.)* I said to Alan the first morning, "You don't think it's his critique of the show, do you?" because he was really upset. The strange thing is, because we had such a tight shooting schedule, a 3-day schedule, we really didn't have a lot of time to sit around the set and schmooze with one another, so I really didn't know that much about Alan until last year.

We had a BATMAN reunion and I got to listen to Alan being interviewed by the foreign press, and learned all sorts of wonderful things about him. I didn't know he started out with **John Gielgud** and **Laurence Olivier,** had done **Shakespeare**, or that his family was very discouraging to him because they felt he would never hold a sensible job as an actor, they didn't think he was very good and was too tall for the stage. I mean, his family made this known to him!

Until **Neil Hamilton** (Commissioner Gordon) died, which wasn't until after we finished shooting, obviously, I didn't know how old Neil had to have been while shooting that show! He was razor-sharp, always knew his dialogue, and was very spry. When I read his obituary, I realized he'd been in silent films. He'd been an early leading man, the hunk of his day.

PAT: *How did you get the part?*

YVONNE: I have no idea! The only thing that happened was **William Dozier,** BATMAN's producer, called me and said, "Would you come in for an interview?" When I got there, they said, "We're thinking of adding a character, Batgirl, into the BATMAN series. Would you be interested in doing it?" I said, "Very!"

At that time I was seeking a series because I had done a lot of episodic TV, but on that, as a guest star, nobody connects a name with a face; they just keep thinking, "Gee, that woman looks familiar. I wonder who that is. If you come into their homes on a daily basis they say "I know who that is!"

PAT: *Did you have a favorite villain?*

YVONNE: Everybody asks me this, and it has absolutely nothing to do with his villainy, it has to do with the fact that I'm madly in love with **Vincent Price!** He was my favorite villain — I just find him to be a fascinating man. I thought he was bright, witty, erudite and nice-looking. He's just wonderful.

PAT: *What's your favorite episode?*

YVONNE: I guess the one where the Penguin wants to marry me because he figures it will give him respectability! ("Enter Batgirl, Exit Penguin") It was the first show I did. I liked the concept that, if you married into the family you can do dastardly deeds and no one's going to call you on them. *(Laughter.)*

I did one show before that, a 15-

As our star appeared on STAR TREK's "Whom Gods Destroy."

©1969 Norway Production for Paramount Television.

"I realize the producers hired me because I had

minute promo to introduce the character and see whether the network wanted Batgirl. In that pilot, she came in, helped Batman and Robin solve a crime, and one said, "Who is that masked girl?" The other one said, "I don't know — but I'd like to know her!"

After they did the promo, they changed the whole mask because these little points on the mask made it look like I'd been crying for weeks; they made tents in my face. We changed that and also opened up the eyes so I could see, because Adam could never see out of his mask, he couldn't look up or down and see anything.

PAT: *When did the Batgirl premiere air?*

YVONNE: No one ever saw it. Only ABC brass. They were introducing Batgirl as a character because their demographics led them to believe that they needed someone to encourage an over-40 male audience and a prepubescent female audience.

PAT: *Any episode you did not like?*

YVONNE: The one that I thought was kind of boring was the four-part story about Londinium ("The Londinium Larcenies"). We shot it with the wonderful **Glynis Johns** (Lady Peasoup) and crabby old **Rudy Vallee** (Lord Ffogg). He was a curmudgeon! Because it was a long one to shoot — four parts — we had him hang around for a long time! Compared to such wonderful guests as **Vincent Price, Cliff Robertson** and **Milton Berle,** he was cranky!

PAT: *Do you like the character?*

YVONNE: I thought she was a fun character, then and now. When we did the 15-minute promo Batgirl pilot, she was a little more acerbic towards Batman, but as the show got going, you don't have time for that kind of nuance. The writer's doing three major characters, plus my father, my father's helper and the general villain of the show. That's a lot of people that you have to decide what to do with. You can't go in depth with any one character, so we lost some of that in the translation.

PAT: *How many of your own stunts did you do?*

YVONNE: I did all of them! Back when ice covered the Earth, I was trained as a ballet dancer, so I used to think the reason they hired me to do the BATMAN show was because of my ballet experience — they knew I could do choreography, which is what fight scenes are. They're all choreographed. That, and the fact that they knew I could ride my own motorcycle, so I could do all my motorcycle stunts on the Batcycle.

One day, years ago, my nephew was watching a BATMAN show, and I realized they probably hired me because I had a cartoon voice! *(Laughter.)* I heard this weird little voice and said, "Omigosh, that's why they hired me!" I said to my sister, "It's a cartoon voice." I don't have that same voice anymore, but *(squeaking)* it sounded just like this!

The motorcycle stunts weren't difficult, but the motorcycle was less than wonderful. They had taken the shocks off it to put Bat-wings on, so it had no shocks. When you went over a bump it was like jumping off a table stiff-legged. You'd really jar your teeth clear to the nubs. *(Laughter.)* It was also quite heavy. Adam complained that his didn't go fast enough, the Batcycle with the side car, so they gave me one so I wouldn't complain.

I had way more bike than I really needed. There was no need for a bike that heavy. If I got it slightly off-center, gravity would drop it and I'd have to pick it up again. It weighed about 350 pounds. I didn't have the upper-body strength to keep it upright, so I'd drop it and kick it. It did have an automatic starter. I said to them, "Please give me an automatic starter. I don't want to kickstart it and have it kick at me!"

PAT: *Why did Batgirl have a pet bird?*

YVONNE: That dreadful bird! *(Laughter.)* That bird was horrible! They decided they didn't want me looking like a lunatic, talking to myself to advance the plot, so rather than me walking around the room, "You know what I think — I think he probably stole such & such & did blahdy-blah," they said, "We'll give you a bird, that will be easy — you'll talk to the bird!" It was fine, except any time you would approach his rotten little cage, he would hop down on the bottom and skulk down so you'd be talking to an empty perch. It was stupid!

When you were out of the scene, he

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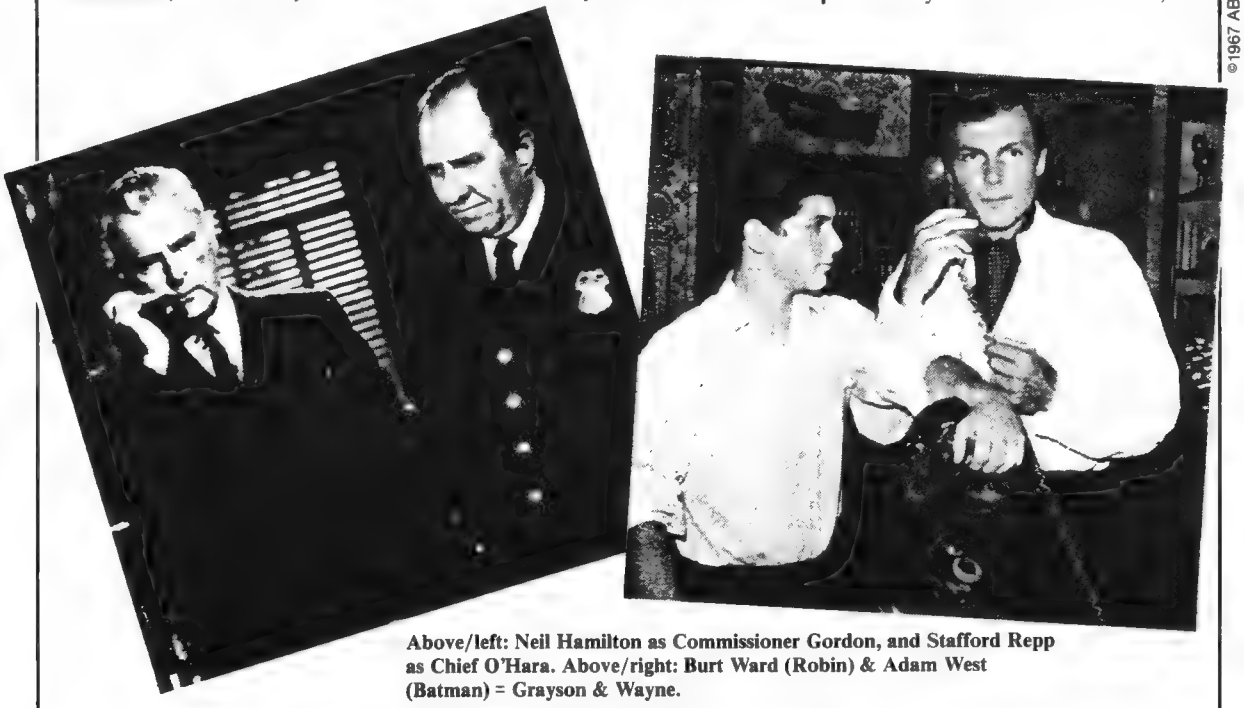

Above/left: Neil Hamilton as Commissioner Gordon, and Stafford Repp as Chief O'Hara. Above/right: Burt Ward (Robin) & Adam West (Batman) = Grayson & Wayne.

a cartoon voice! I don't have that anymore."

Yvonne (without her pet bird) avoiding Burgess Meredith (Penguin).

would make horrible squawking noises and ruin all the takes! Screaming and jumping when we don't need him. They should have stuffed a bird — I don't know why they didn't stuff him! *(Evil laughter.)* That parrot drove us mad. He was always looking for a way to get out. One day he flew out and he got way up in the rafters and catwalks and wouldn't come out. We couldn't shoot because we could get in the middle of a take and he'd swoop. S'funny, my stand-in took a liking to him, and took him home when the show was over. Later, I did a FANTASY ISLAND, and her husband was one of the grips. He said to me, "Do you know we still have Charlie the Parrot?"

PAT: *Did you ever meet Bob Kane, Batman's creator?*

YVONNE: I met **Bob Kane** only once, just briefly, and I don't recall we had much of a conversation, but he was disgruntled, I don't know whether rightly so or not, that he was not invited to do very much on the BATMAN show, as far as being a consultant or whatever. I understand he was hired as a consultant for the new movie, so I imagine he's probably happy.

PAT: *What's your opinion of the new movie?*

YVONNE: I haven't seen it yet, but I think it harkens back to what the Batman concept originally was. We were the aberration, we really were, because it was not the concept to be pop-art and campy, that was what was going on in the 1960s. We sort of set a standard for that. I have a feeling the movie is very much of the '80s, as we were of the '60s. As we were of our time, it will probably be of its time. It seems to be darker, but when people are bludgeoned just trying to jog in Central Park it's very timely.

PAT: *Speaking of dark, what did you think of the Barbara Gordon/Batgirl comic character being shot and crippled in THE KILLING JOKE?*

YVONNE: You mean what happened to my character? Yeah, somebody sent me that comic. Apparently, she was hit with a sniper's bullet in the spine. Sounds awful, but I figure it's their character to do with what they want, as long as they don't do it really to me! *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *Are you recognized a lot?*

YVONNE: Infrequently. When I came through London, from Africa, a young man at the immigration counter said, prior to my handing him my passport, "I know who you are!" So it's kinda fun.

When we were doing the series, I was in a supermarket and a little girl came up to me and said, "I know who you *really* are!" I thought "Good, she's gonna say **Yvonne Craig!**" So I said, "Really — Who?" She said, "Barbara Gordon!" *(Laughter.)*

People your age say to me, "Wow, you lived through the 1960s!" as though it were some miracle! In point of fact, if you were born when I was born, you would have lived through the '60s just as you lived through the '80s!

"It's a contrast in character between a dark,

STEVE RUDE

As I sit here on a sunny California day, having just interviewed NEXUS artist Steve Rude, there's a couple of things I'd like to mention about Steve — he's an intense dude! And a real fair-dinkum bloke with a sense of humor who helped me finish off a bottle of Spumante.

At certain points in the interview we got a little loose and let fly, so this should be a fun bit for you to get into. Bear in mind, we were just two dudes having a good time on a Saturday night. Now, sit back, you are going to get a taste of what makes NEXUS (in part Mike Baron) and Steve Rude tick! Cheers . . .

PAUL POWER: *I'm talking with Steve Rude, artist on NEXUS, SPACE GHOST, the MR. MIRACLE SPECIAL and . . . what else are you working on, Steve?*

STEVE RUDE: What else am I *going* to be working on. The only plans at present are to do a project for DC, a Superman and Batman thing.

PAUL: *Will you be writing this, or co-writing?*

STEVE: I'll just be drawing it and painting the covers. It'll be three issues long, 48 pages each — it's going to be a lot of work. Once I get done with that, then it's back to NEXUS. The idea there is to establish myself again with the readership, who may have forgotten me by that time. And after NEXUS we go to SPACE GHOST II.

PAUL: *Do you think you'll get to that by the end of the year?*

STEVE: *(Laughter.)* I'm sure that it won't be started until at least January. If I say January, in reality it seems to come about a few months after I think it's

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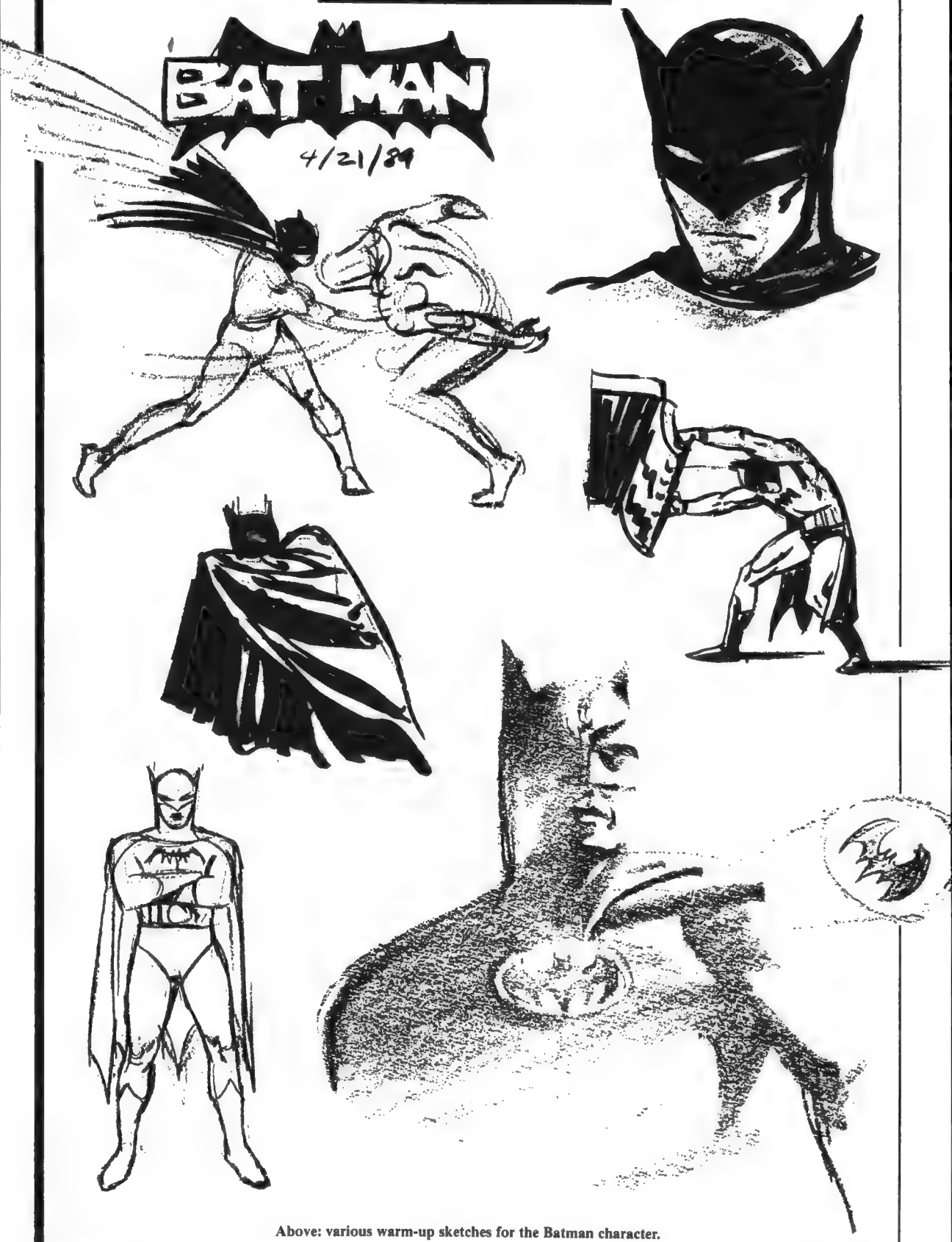
moody guy and this All-American gleaming icon."

More Bat sketches — Kane style.



Above: various warm-up sketches for the Batman character.

"The original Joker — he's more scary than any other."

going to be started.

PAUL: *Now, with the Batman and Superman thing, can you tell us about the story at all?*

STEVE: Well, I can tell you a little. I just received the first two stories from **Dave Gibbons,** and I *know* it's going to be fun working with him. The guy has got a great attitude about everything. We spend half the time on the phone laughing, you know, over our similar thoughts and —

PAUL: *Wait a minute, he lives in England — who pays the bill?*

STEVE: *(Laughter.)* It depends on who calls. I wonder, I'll have to ask DC about that, yeah.

PAUL: *Yeah, it's a business call.*

STEVE: Yeah! I think they will pick up the tab on that. But the story . . . well, the *best* way to describe *any* story is to say it in a sentence; you can tell in a sentence if it's going to work or not. For this story it's simply a contrast in character between a dark, moody guy that hangs around in this filthy Gotman City, cleaning up the criminals like they were some kind of vermin, and this All-American gleaming icon who represents all of the things that are positive about the American experience.

PAUL: *Does it in any way take from Frank Miller's DARK KNIGHT, or what John Byrne has done with Superman?*

STEVE: I think there's going to be a few carry-overs.

PAUL: *Will the BATMAN film have any bearing on this WORLD'S FINEST?*

STEVE: Well, I haven't seen it yet. It will have a bearing on what I do if it turns out it's something that I like. But, from *my* point of view, from what *I* am going to have to do to make this book work, my gimmicks are I'm going to be returning the characters to what they originally were, and exploiting the contrast. The sources that I will be drawing from for Superman and Batman are the original sources of those characters, which I still think are *probably* the best versions.

PAUL: *Oh, nice. Are you going to try and do a true Steve Rude version of Joe Shuster and Bob Kane?*

STEVE: Yeah. Despite all of the years of development in these characters, I think the original concepts, the way those people *originally* did these characters, still has what's most exciting about them. It's hard for me to explain *what* that is. When I look at the original **Bob Kane** BATMANs, when I look at the original Joker — he's more scary than any other Joker I've seen ever —

PAUL: *Yeah.*

STEVE: Scary stuff. So, that's how I'm going to gear up this whole thing, just go back to the source; which feels good in my heart, to know that I'm doing that.

PAUL: *I'd like to see how you handle Superman. I feel that's truly the most powerful Superman, where he's really a strong guy, a strong man.*

STEVE: Yeah, **Shuster** gave it an incredible physical presence.

PAUL: *Will Dave Gibbons be doing any layouts on this?*

STEVE: None. He's described it very completely, though, taking all of his experience from working with **Alan Moore** and doing it himself now. The first script was about 100 damn pages long.

PAUL: *What did you think of that?*

STEVE: I'm gonna be in for a lot of readin'. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Will you be sending him roughs?*

STEVE: Well, I don't really *do* roughs. I do thumbnails, and from the thumbnails I enlarge them just by eyeing them out. I don't do full-size roughs that people can check out.

PAUL: *With him writing this script, has he expressed any desires that he may have wanted to draw this thing himself?*

STEVE: Well, I can probably speak for Dave: Of course he would. I mean, he has visualized this thing so *completely,* I think it would be something in the back of his mind that he would like to shoot for — he would like to see what *he* would do. Sure, he'd like to draw it for himself, and in a sense he already has. In his mind he has drawn the complete thing out, totally.

PAUL: *Is this, like, a WATCHMEN treatment, do you feel?*

STEVE: Yeah, yeah. It's not going to be that hard, though. It's going to be hard when it *has* to be, but it's also going to be

"Baron said, 'You know, if you did one issue of

kind of funny. **Gibbons'** great sense of humor is going to come through in his writing.

PAUL: *You know what might be nice —I'm just throwing this out, all right — it might be nice if Gibbons inked this.*

STEVE: Hm. God, I never thought about that. Yeah. That is really *interesting.* I'll have to ask about that.

PAUL: *I think it's good that you're working with Dave Gibbons.*

STEVE: Yeah, I have a good feeling about that. I like the fact mostly that he is an unconventional choice as a writer. I *love* how people react to that. "*What,* **Dave Gibbons** is writing, shouldn't he be drawing?" No, he's writing the damn thing.

PAUL: *How did that come about?*

STEVE: Originally, I walked into **Bruning's** office at DC and said, "You know, Rich, I'm moving to L.A., I've got to start making some bread here. I know that I'm going to be working with DC again eventually, so let's pick out a project that's going to make some bread." And then he . . . No, that was after I talked to **Baron.** It was **Baron** who came up to me and said, "You know, if you did one issue of THE PUNISHER, you could buy a new car." And I laughed it off, you know, foolishly. But then the move came up, so he said, "Well, let's do a SUPERMAN graphic novel; sales will go through the roof and you'll make tons of money."

As time went by things got shuffled around — I don't know how these things come about — and then **Dave Gibbons** was suggested as a writer, and I said I'd love to work with him. It's just one of those things where, you know, I've worked with **Baron** a million times, we're always going to be known for NEXUS, we'll work together in the future — but I loved the idea of working with somebody fresh and new just *because* it's fresh and new. It's not because it would be *better,* I just *like* that idea, it rings true to my feelings about doing the right things for my career and everything like that. **Dave Gibbons** sounded great, you know.

Rough layout for a double-page NEXUS spread by Steve.

THE PUNISHER, you could buy a new car."

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"I've been interested in comics since I was a kid."

When DAK called Kirk Groenveld to ask him to interview Todd Reis about his extraordinary collection of Batman art, since Kirk and Todd lived relatively close to each other, he got lucky. For if DAK had called Kirk one day — or even several hours — later, he would have gotten one of those much beloved recorded messages that the phone company is so famous for. That was the day Kirk moved. He now lives very, very far away from Todd.

Kirk was good enough to take a few hours away from loading up; he delayed his departure and went over to meet Todd for a massive photo session and discussion of various pieces. Unfortunately, he couldn't really interview Todd thoroughly, they barely had time to take the pictures, but his background work and his observations were invaluable to me in conducting this interview. Someday I hope to visit Todd and view his collection personally, as Kirk did, because I know these marvelous photographs I've been drooling over can't really do it justice . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *Todd, what's your background as a collector?*
TODD REIS: Well, I've been interested in comics since I was a little kid. There was a point when I stopped collecting in high school, but I started again in college. Then I got involved in doing the three-dimensional shadowboxes based on comic-book covers. I've been doing that for fifteen years now and I've done a *lot* of trading with known artists — I would exchange a 3-D, something that I did, for an original drawing of something *they* did.
DARREL: *Why Batman?*

TODD REIS

The Batman ©1990 DC Comics, Inc.

"I buy 12 or 15 issues and take off the covers."

Here's a close-up of the PLAYBOY 3-D. Simply take an X-acto knife, a stack of PLAYBOY photos, Todd's imagination (and sense of design) and mix well with many hours of patience — a work of art.

TODD: I've always *liked* the character, but I'm not a fanatic about it. I look at it as a litmus test. I would always make my first request for their version of the Batman. The Batman is *so* interesting to draw that *most* artists enjoy getting the chance to do the character, even though they may not have done the character prior to my request. Once I've gotten a Batman piece, then I'll trade for other pieces. But I request Batman to see how each artist interprets that character. It also lends a certain *uniqueness* to my art collection.

I've also done 3-Ds for other collectors for money. But *trading* them allows me to acquire pieces of art that I normally would not have been able to afford. The art collection is something I *treasure.*

DARREL: *We talked with you back in COMICS INTERVIEW #41 about the 3-Ds — but could you explain again briefly what the 3-Ds are about?*

TODD: Basically, it goes back to the art of Japanese paper tolling. I buy about twelve or fifteen issues of the same comic and take off the covers — and yes, I do get rid of the comics, I give them away to people to read. Most of what I do are fairly recent issues, though there have been times when I've done back issues. Nevertheless, what I do is I take an X-acto knife and cut out the cover layer by layer. Then I mount it together, separating each layer with balsa wood; but instead of leaving just flat layers, I tend to curve and shape and bend to actually give form and shape to the figures.

And like I said, the average 3-D is between twelve and fifteen layers, which could be anywhere from three to six inches deep. There have been some that have been about *twenty* layers deep, due to the immense amount of detail. A few other people also do this. Some have *copied* me, others have developed it on their own, but *nobody* I know, in the

"I have a pencil piece from Mike Nasser."

fifteen years I've been doing it, does it to the depth and with the attention to detail that I do. I ran into a fellow, **Jeff Michalson**, who does the same type of thing with posters of magicians which were three or four layers deep. When he saw mine he said if *he* were Luke Skywalker, *I* was Yoda. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *And you trade these 3-Ds for art?*

TODD: About half of what I do, I trade for art. I have other clients who pay for them. And I also don't *just* do comics art. I have done movie posters, prints, postcards, etc. I'm also involved in magic — I'm a member of the Magic Castle, so I've been veering towards doing magic-oriented things. GAMES magazine recently had a cover photograph of magical props, so I'm going to be making a 3-D of that.

DARREL: *You are a collector of the art as well as of the books. How did you get into that?*

TODD: The situation came up *originally* with **Bill Stout.** He wanted a 3-D from me, but couldn't afford to buy it at the time, so we worked out a trade; the **Bill Stout** piece was the first in my collection. That was kind of neat. I really originally did not intend to build a collection, but I kind of . . .

DARREL: *You kind of fell into it?*

TODD: Yes. As it turned out, I got *hooked* on it, and I went around *purposely* contacting artists to work out trades. Back in 1978, I did a 3-D of THE SWAMP THING SAGA for **Berni Wrightson**. He gave me a Batman in the Thinker position with a smouldering volcano in the background, which I really treasure. And that is *definitely* something I could never afford to pay for, at least not at that time. I really did not *meet* him until two years ago at the San Diego Con. We worked out the trade by mail and telephone.

DARREL: *Getting into the art collecting side of it . . . what is it about comic-book art that makes it something you would want to collect?*

TODD: It's not something that a lot of people *do* collect. **Dr. Ron Silverstein,** who I've done countless 3-Ds for, is the only person I know whose Batman collection exceeds mine. However, what attracts me, I don't know; I just *like* the art.

In doing the 3-Ds, I've learned to *appreciate* the work that goes into a piece of art. I wish I could draw that well. When I do a 3-D, I go through almost every line; I get to know the artist pretty well.

DARREL: *That sounds like what an inker might say about their work.*

TODD: Right, because they get these beautiful pencils to ink. So, the 3-D art has given me a deeper appreciation for the comic art. It actualized my appreciation more.

DARREL: *For someone who might be thinking of starting their own collection of comic art, what can they expect? What's out there? What's going on? How does it work?*

TODD: Well, every year I go to the San Diego Con, and there are a few other smaller cons that I go to. San Diego is the big one. Numerous artists always show up there who are more than willing to do sketches for anywhere from $10 to $50, or more if you want to commission something to be done at their studios and have sent to you. Basically, conventions are good places to *meet* the artists and have them do quick sketches.

And there are also a few dealers who sell original art pages, which can go anywhere from $10 to $1,000 depending on the artist. *Howard Chaykin's* art is extremely expensive. **Todd McFarlane** has just *zoomed* up since he went over to Marvel to do SPIDER-MAN. One thing you can do is grab onto an artist that you like, someone early in his career, if you think this guy is going to go far. I have a pencil piece in my colleciton from **Mike Nasser,** who has more or less disappeared from the comics world now, I think he's in the Middle East studying religion. But his pencils are absolutely terrific.

Mike Nasser.

"I think Brian Bolland's KILLING JOKE cover would

Walt Simonson's now-classic The Batman vs. The Joker illustration.

As far as trading, I don't think enough people have the opportunity to trade with the artists like I do. If you can work out something, great. I give the artists something that they can't put into their art, the extra dimension of depth, no matter how well they can draw. I think **Brian Bolland's** KILLING JOKE cover would be a *great* 3-D. There's so much dimension in there already, the way he drew it, but there's still something else I can add to it.

Some artists are very cooperative, some artists aren't. Some artists just don't have the time to do sketches. If they say no, you've got to take it with a grain of salt, *especially* at a convention. Sometimes you can work out a deal where you can contact them later on, if you can get their number and address, *especially* if you want an elaborate piece that would best be done *away* from the convention. Some artists, especially if they're popular like **Frank Miller,** are usually just mobbed and don't have a lot of time to draw anything or care to draw anything at a con. You can also try reaching artists by writing to them care of their comic company.

DARREL: *Well, you got into collecting the art in the early- or mid-'70s, I take it?*

TODD: Correct.

DARREL: *Pop art was really big in the '60s, and then it kind of died off for awhile. In the time that you have been collecting, what kind of action in the field have you seen?*

TODD: Right now there's a lull; collecting original art is not quite as popular as it has been, but that comes and goes. Pop art during the '60s was mainly posters of Superman *a la* **Curt Swan** and **Murphy Anderson.** During the '70s, thanks to **Neal Adams,** the art becomes more dramatic and realistic. That alone caused a turnaround. Art now has become more . . .

DARREL: *Cartooney?*

TODD: Some of it has become cartooney, if you look at something like **Kyle Baker** did with THE SHADOW or with JUSTICE, INC. If you look at **Sienkiewicz's** stuff, it's more abstract. When you look at the stuff that was done in the BLACK ORCHID book, it's more surreal. There is a broader range of styles. The artists tend to be doing a better job for the most part. I really enjoy the fact that they are publishing books now in higher stock, better quality paper, to improve the reproduction of the art. On the other hand, I don't think the paper is *worth* it, when the artist really hasn't put as much into it as he could. Some publishers will print anything in deluxe format just to get more money if the subject is popular. I was extremely disappointed with THE PRISONER mini-series. The delays were inexcusable also. I would have preferred a better writer and artist on that series for the price they were selling it.

DARREL: *As you said, you get a lot of Batman art — just about all of the stuff we have photos of is The Batman. I wish I could come and look at it in person; I don't think these photos are doing it justice.*

TODD: No, plus you have no relative idea of the sizes of the various pieces. They range from 8" by 10", **Sergio Aragones'** little cartoon, to the **Brent Anderson** or **Walt Simonson** pieces, which are movie poster size.

There's an interesting story: That was drawn by Walt for my collection, and before he mailed it to me, he showed it to **Len Wein** who was Batman editor at the time. He had to have it for a cover, so he had **Doug Moench** write and **Don Newton** draw a story, based on the Batman and Joker fighting atop this tower. It wasn't *quite* the same, I believe they used an Aztec or Inca tower in that particular story; but nevertheless, it was based upon this piece which then became

be a great 3-D. There's so much dimension in there."

the cover of BATMAN #366.

DARREL: *Let's talk a little about what makes particular pieces valuable. Of course, the artist is going to be one factor, and the subject would be another factor, I suppose —*

TODD: Well, it doesn't have to be valuable if there's something that you *like*. There are a number of pieces that I have that were done by amateurs, but I really enjoy them.

But the predominant thing that makes a piece valuable is going to be the artist, his popularity and/or his availability to *doing* original art. To my knowledge, **Wrightson** rarely ever does anything outside of his publication work, which makes the piece I have something quite special. And if you go to any convention, you will not find **John Byrne** drawing or autographing hardly anything at all.

If you're looking at it from an investment standpoint, that's fine — but personally, if I see something I like, professional or amateur, that's what I want. I look at my collection as a whole, I would not break it up. The main thing, especially if you're going to have it up on your wall and you're going to be looking at it all of the time, it should be something that you enjoy looking at. It doesn't matter how valuable it is.

DARREL: *In other words, you're not looking for investment potential as much as you are looking for the aesthetic value, how it feels to you?*

TODD: Right. There are a lot of people investing in original art, as they are investing in comics. If you want to make an investment, go with a popular artist.

DARREL: *Well, let's go through some of these pieces here. I'd like to, I don't know, get what you feel about each piece; why it's important to you.*

TODD: There are some underlying stories with some of them.

DARREL: *We might as well start with the Bill Stout piece, which DAK used as the cover for COMICS INTERVIEW #74.*

TODD: Yes. That was, as I said before, the original piece I traded for. It's done in airbrush, a very simplistic Batman similar to what **Bob Kane** may have done. A very nice coloring job.

DARREL: *The next piece we have here is in black and white, I believe, by Rick Hoberg, Batman punching out the Joker.*

TODD: Right. **Rick Hoberg** I've known for several years, he used to live down here. This was done back in 1978. He was doing covers for the STAR WARS tabloid from Marvel at the time. I did a 3-D of that and asked for a Batman in

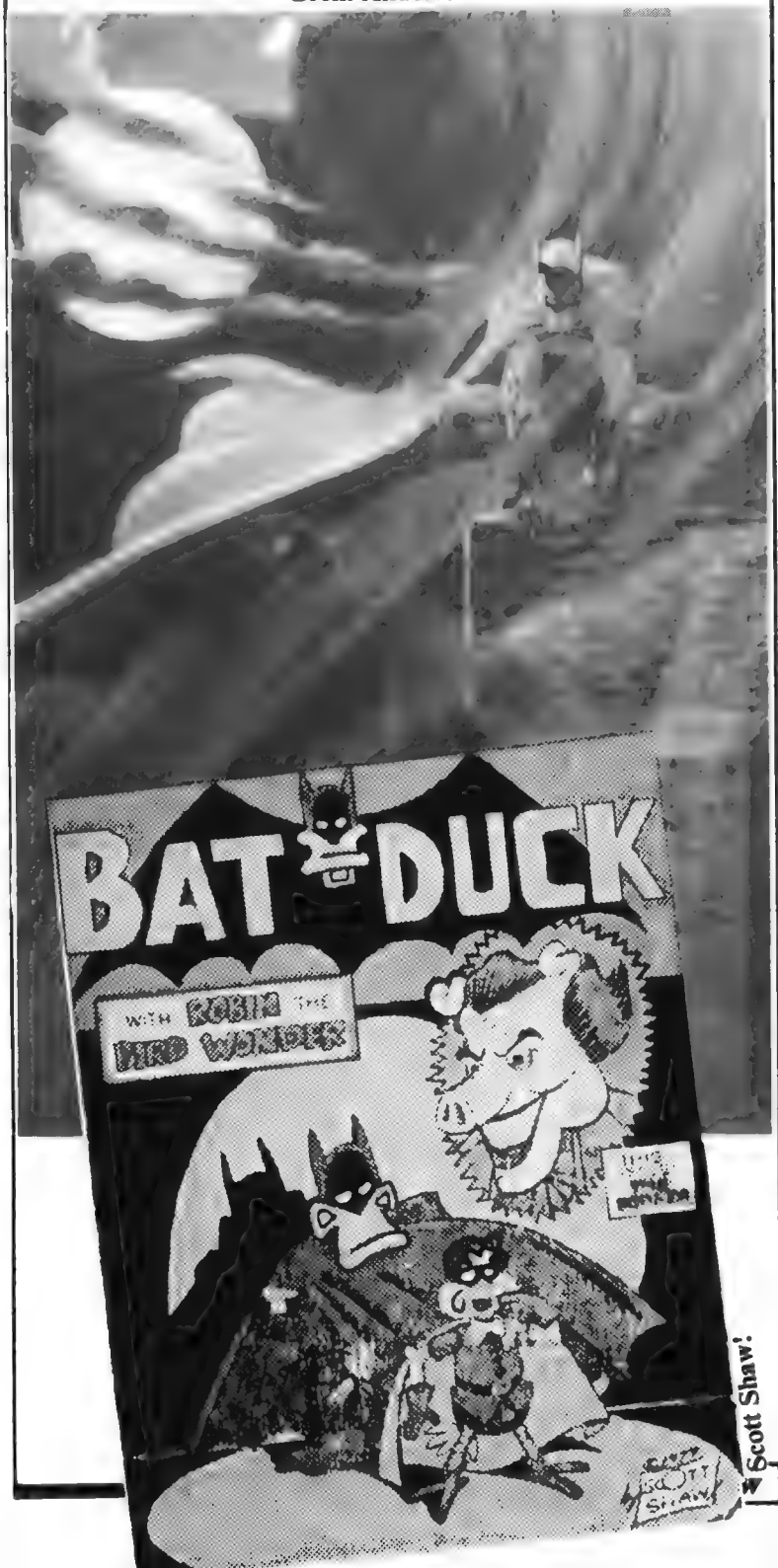
Rick Hoberg.

"Batman's popularity zoomed since DARK KNIGHT."

exchange.

DARREL: *It's a neat piece with the two images of Batman. To tell you the truth, I like the background image better than the foreground image.* (Laughter.) *It's such a nice piece. Moving along, we've got Terry Austin, Batman leaping after the Penguin.*

Brent Anderson.



Scott Shaw!

TODD: This was colored and used on the back of an issue of THE COMIC READER, that old, defunct comics fan magazine — but I have the original in black-and-white. I think Terry drew it for me, but also sent it to TCR because he owed them something. I'm not sure of the issue, wait a minute. *(A few moments later.)* Okay, July 1980, #181, if anybody collects that magazine. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Three things about this piece strike me —*

TODD: Before you tell me, I would say that I felt it was very heavily influenced by **Marshall Rogers.**

DARREL: *That's very obvious, in the Batman especially. And his shadow falling onto the building like a giant bat symbol, that is really neat. I really like this version of the Penguin. And the tapers on Batman's gauntlets, they're almost like Wolverine's claws.*

TODD: Yes.

DARREL: *It's a neat effect.*

TODD: I've always liked the amount of detail that Terry put into his inking during that period. Now he's gotten more sketchy, doesn't embellish quite as much as he used to.

DARREL: *The next one is by Joe Staton, Huntress standing in front of Bruce Wayne's grave, with a big Batman in the background.*

TODD: That obviously was based on the *original* Huntress, the daughter of Bruce Wayne and Catwoman. This was done shortly after she was created, a water-color wash done in gray and white.

DARREL: *Has what they've done now with the Huntress changed your feelings for this piece in any way?*

TODD: Well, it gives me a strange feeling. I liked the older costume better, the original costume. I look at the new Huntress, even though she has the same name, and similar costume, as a different character — well, she *is* a different character. They've pretty much broken all ties with the old one. So, I do feel sad that they did get rid of the original Huntress. But I understand why they did it, because they were redoing the DC Universe and the Huntress was an inconsistency, it didn't fit in. I can't really blame them.

DARREL: *Now, this next one just blows me away — Brent Anderson.*

TODD: He was doing KA-ZAR at the time that he did this. I did a 3-D for him, and he reciprocated by doing a poster-sized piece for me. It's done on *green* paper with chalk pastels, and it's Batman crouched on a chimney with the wind or fog swirling around, the full moon in the

"I feel sad they got rid of the original Huntress."

Joe Staton.

Don Newton.

background, and the cape billowing out to the side.

DARREL: *And it's a really humongous cape.* (Laughter.) *Of course, he's crouching, it's hard to tell, but it seems like an incredible amount of cape.*

TODD: This was done in '82. I heard on the TV that Batman's popularity has zoomed up ever since DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, and somebody had credited **Frank Miller** with the return of the dark avenger. But if you look at this collection, and if you really look back on a *majority* of the stories, you can see how it was really **Denny O'Neil** who should be credited, and **Neal Adams.** A lot of these were done prior to DARK KNIGHT RETURNS and are very moody.

DARREL: *The next piece we have is the Scott Shaw BATDUCK cover.*

TODD: I've known Scott a long time, and this is *prior* to him doing CAPTAIN CARROT. This is a takeoff on an old '40s BATMAN cover where Batman was introducing Robin. It's humorous, we have Batduck and Robin the Bird Wonder and the Porker, the Joker with sort of a pig face. I think he eventually did use the Porker somewhere in the CAPTAIN CARROT series, but this was definitely done a long time prior to that. And it's sort of neat because he signed his name *a la* **Bob Kane** with the big "O."

DARREL: *Moving on, we've got Don Newton. This one may not reproduce well because it's so dark, Batman could pretty much vanish.*

TODD: But the Joker face is what *makes* this one, in my opinion. The Batman is a nice pose, but he painted him too blue.

DARREL: *Yes. It almost looks like one of those carved models, the Batman. The Joker face is incredible, though.*

TODD: Yes, I just can't talk enough about the Joker, it's such a very *menacing* face. And I can see what you say about the Batman, it looks almost like a figurine of some sort. It's unfortunate that Don passed away.

DARREL: *Now, one thing I had wondered about is if the Batman is the main focus of your collection, the other characters who appear with him in various pieces, do they increase your appreciation for any of these pieces?*

TODD: It adds variety to the collection. Instead of it being too monotonous, just having the Batman, having the Penguin and Talia and the Huntress breaks up the monotony and makes it a little bit more interesting — especially if the artist had a hand in doing something with the other character. In the case of the Huntress, **Joe Staton** had a hand in creating that character, so that really does add something to the piece, at least for me.

DARREL: *Going back to that one, I really liked it a lot, but I think it would have been nice if the Catwoman had been in it as well, since the Huntress was the daughter of both.*

TODD: That's true.

DARREL: *But let's not get nitpicky.* (Laughter.) *The next one is the famous Berni Wrightson Batman in the Thinker position. This one is just beautiful.*

TODD: Yes, it is. At the time, they were reprinting the SWAMP THING series in their dollar comics, and I did a 3-D from one of the covers. He apparently was so blown away by all the layers — that one was 20 layers deep — that he took a flashlight and inspected the whole piece layer by layer. And he reciprocated by doing this *beautiful* piece. The leg does look very strange, though, almost monstrous. But I *really* like the way his cape drapes over his shoulder, the texture to the cape. It's Batman in the Thinker position in a sort of cavelike atmosphere, but yet there's a sky in the background and a smoldering volcano. I guess it's symbolic of the violence that's within him

"Wrightson inspected the whole piece layer by layer."

Marshall Rogers.

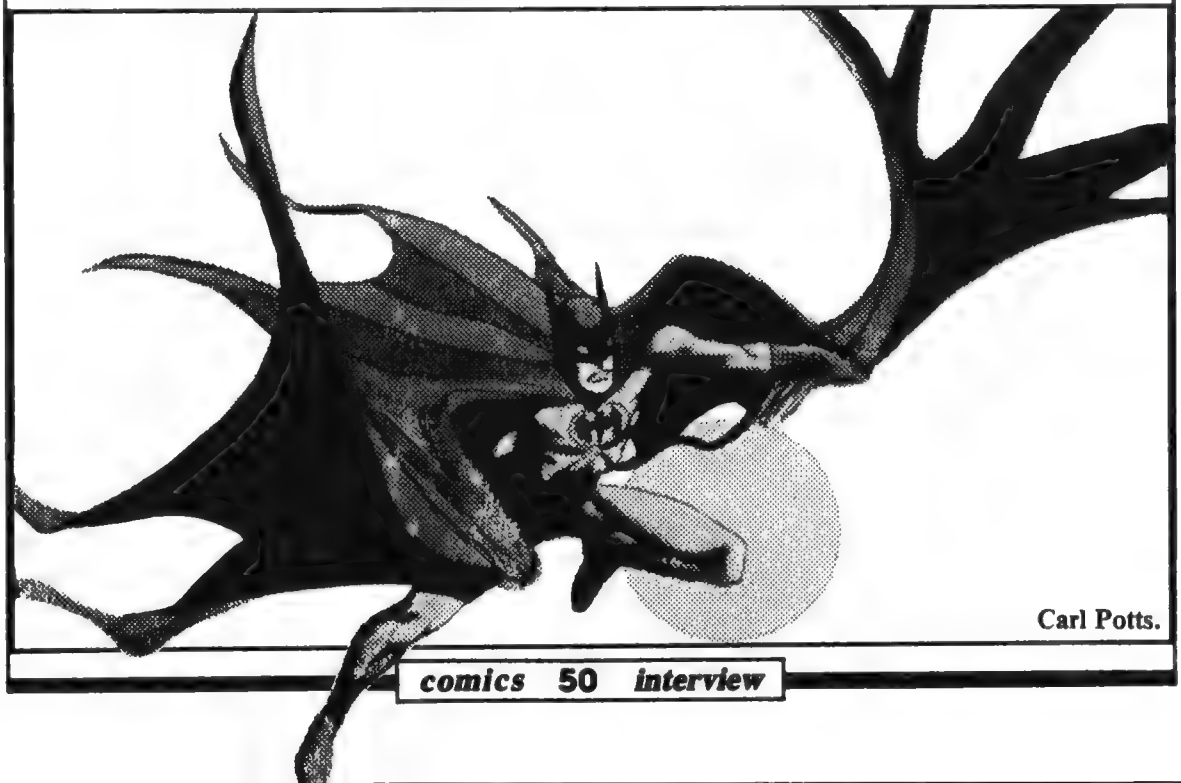
which can erupt at any moment.

DARREL: *It is a very evocative piece.*

TODD: It is another piece which I have gotten several offers for, but I will never get rid of it. Someday I hope to get a Joker from **Berni Wrightson;** he does owe me a piece. I did another 3-D for him and I have yet to finish the deal with him on that.

DARREL: *Next we have Carl Potts.*

TODD: Carl was at the time always showing up at the San Diego Con trying to get work. This was before he became an editor at Marvel, and he had just started to do several books. I always had



Carl Potts.

"I lived not too far from Jack Kirby."

been after him to do a sketch, so finally he came up with that particular piece of Batman running with the cape flying every which way. I really like it, it's one of *my* favorites.

DARREL: *It is interesting, you don't often see the cape done this way. It's a neat effect, just scattered out all over the place.*

TODD: Yes. That one I bought from Carl. I never worked out a trade with him because he hasn't done that many covers.

DARREL: *Next we have Marshall Rogers.*

TODD: It took me awhile to collect on this one. I had done a 3-D when he was doing DETECTIVE, the issue with the Penguin on the cover. Because he was always so busy and I couldn't really track him down, until I caught him at the San Diego Con and he did this for me. It was done in very light pencils which he then inked with a marker. It took him about ten minutes.

DARREL: *Ten minutes!*

TODD: Ten, fifteen maybe, not very long at all.

DARREL: *That's amazing.*

TODD: It's a fairly small piece, about 8" by 10".

DARREL: *Well, the thing that struck me here was the way the cape kind of swoops over Batman's right shoulder. I stared at this for some time trying to figure out just how that would be possible, because there must be some way that it can happen.*

TODD: He's swinging on the batrope, leaning forward with his feet out behind him, so if he's swinging forward then it would be blowing in back of him. But it doesn't go back, it goes sort of forward. But it is, from a stylistic point of view, very interesting.

DARREL: *Oh, yes, and it's a neat effect. And it should be said that comic art doesn't all have to conform to the laws of physics, 'cause most of it doesn't anyway.*

TODD: Right.

DARREL: *Next we have a nice curiosity by Jack Kirby.*

TODD: Yep, Batman fighting Captain America. I had lived out in Thousand Oaks for a number of years, not too far from where Jack lives, and I was always seeing him around the mall where I worked at the time. I did a 3-D of the cover of the 2001 tabloid that he did, and he gave me this in return. As you can see, it's an *excellent* Captain America, which is to be expected from **Kirby.** The Batman looks a little awkward, but nevertheless it's a **Jack Kirby,** which makes it, as you said, a curiosity.

Berni Wrightson

DARREL: *And as far as the Batman goes, it really does remind me of Miller's DARK KNIGHT in the sense of the style.*

TODD: Hmm — I've never drawn that parallel, but to each his own. The hulking type figure?

DARREL: *Right, yeah. I like it, al-*

"Byrne says it's like money in the bank."

though I don't think he did the cape very well.

TODD: No, it's more of a Thor cape, I think, with a number of small, little, mildly arched points. If he did maybe *half* the number of points, make it a little more billowy instead of turning down — but it's still a nice **Jack Kirby** piece. And he's a wonderful man, the very salt of the earth. If you ever get the chance to meet him, do so. He's one of the nicest people on this planet.

DARREL: *Moving on, next we have two pieces we might as well talk about together, by Ken Steacy. One is Batman on a flagpole, one is Joker holding a chainsaw.*

TODD: Yes. The Batman piece came first. I had done a 3-D of an Iron Man cover from MARVEL FANFARE for Ken. Then two years later he said that he wanted another 3-D, so I said I'd like a piece on the Joker, so he made a companion piece. It's a *little* smaller, but they still go together quite well. I haven't gotten around to framing them yet, I don't know why. They're so beautiful. I can't decide how I want to frame them. *(Laughter.)* They were done in airbrush, very much like his work from MARVEL FANFARE.

DARREL: *They're very uniquely stylized pieces, too. I can't recall ever seeing anything quite like this Batman before.*

TODD: That was done about the same time as the **Simonson** piece, and when **Steacy** heard about *that* being used for a cover, I think he showed DC a slide of that Batman in hopes that they might want that for a cover. But nothing ever came of that.

DARREL: *That's a shame, it would have been a very different cover if nothing else.*

TODD: Yes.

DARREL: *Next we have a very interesting dark, moody piece by John Byrne, Batman standing on top of the building with the eagles.*

TODD: Yes. There are a number of pieces which have this eagle, or some type of gargoyle or whatever. When Kirk was here, he kept noticing that the eagle was a recurring theme on a number of them, that it seems to turn up quite often. I don't know if it's an established place in Gotham City or what, where it comes from. Nevertheless, this is an oil painting done by **John Byrne.** I've done eight or nine 3-Ds for John, and this was one of the first things I got *from* him. The cape looks a little awkward, I'm not really quite happy with the way he did the cape, but the stance is typical, I think, of **Byrne.**

DARREL: *Well, the cape, it almost looks like it's melting, like it's made of wax and a flame has been taken to the edges.*

TODD: Yes. And it's done with the *black* cape as opposed to the blue colored cape.

DARREL: *Well, it's the old Batman, the '40s Batman, which you can tell from the chest symbol, of course.*

TODD: Right.

DARREL: *A very nice piece. You've done a number of 3-Ds for John Byrne, is he one of your major contributors?*

TODD: Usually for each 3-D I do for him, he allows me to have three of his original covers for my collection. It's a very nice and lucrative trade, I think. And currently he owes me about six covers. *(Laughter.)* I believe he just hasn't had the time to sort through all of his covers. He gets stuff back by the ton, and being as busy as he is, he just stores them

Jack Kirby.

TODD REIS

Ken Steacy.

John Byrne.

"As an art teacher friend of mine said, less is more."

Bill Sienkiewicz.

away and doesn't have the time to just sit down and decide which ones to send me. But he says it's like money in the bank and as soon as he gets around to looking through what he has, he will.

DARREL: *Next up we have a very interesting pre-expressionist Bill Sienkiewicz piece.*

TODD: This was just about the time he stopped doing MOON KNIGHT and before he went into the, like you said, expressionism or abstract trend. This *almost* looks like a photograph from far away — the further away you get, the better it looks. It almost looks like . . . at the time I would have said **Adam West** in the Batman costume. It was done in chalk pastels, and I've gotten a *lot* of offers for it.

DARREL: *I can well imagine. Have you gotten more offers as he's gotten more popular?*

TODD: No. A lot of people just don't see my collection, not that many people

"Someone credited Miller with returning the dark avenger."

know of what I have.

DARREL: *Next — I'm trying to get through as many of these as we can while we still have tape — next we have a George Perez Batman, very obviously CRISIS related.*

TODD: Right. It's sort of a fisheye look at the city with Batman swinging towards you. He colored it *interestingly.* Personally, I think it might have been better left in black and white.

DARREL: *Well, but the red sky makes it obviously a CRISIS piece. I don't mean to pry about how you felt about the CRISIS or anything, you already commented on that about the Huntress —*

TODD: I felt it needed to be done. I mean, I can really sympathize with the way things were going with the stories upon stories and the revisions upon revisions, and times change.

DARREL: *I was wondering how your feelings for the CRISIS affected your feelings for this piece?*

TODD: It doesn't faze it, to me it's just a **George Perez** piece. In fact, I don't think I've ever thought about it being CRISIS related myself. You say "red sky," the same could be said of the piece **Giordano** did.

DARREL: *Well, it's red sky with lightning and by George Perez.*

TODD: Actually, it's more of a dark purple sky.

DARREL: *Next we have a piece — I think you will be able to tell everybody about this one — by Jerry Ordway.*

TODD: Yeah. Jerry's a hell of a nice fellow and at one time he and **Roy Thomas** created Obsidian for INFINITY, INC. I thought it would be natural for him to draw Batman along with Obsidian for me, not because of the fact that both are blue and gray and black, their costume colors, but because Obsidian is Todd Rice. He was born and raised in Milwaukee, as was I — it's sort of an in-joke between **Roy Thomas** and myself.

DARREL: *And the only thing you haven't mentioned is that again we have this eagle gargoyle.*

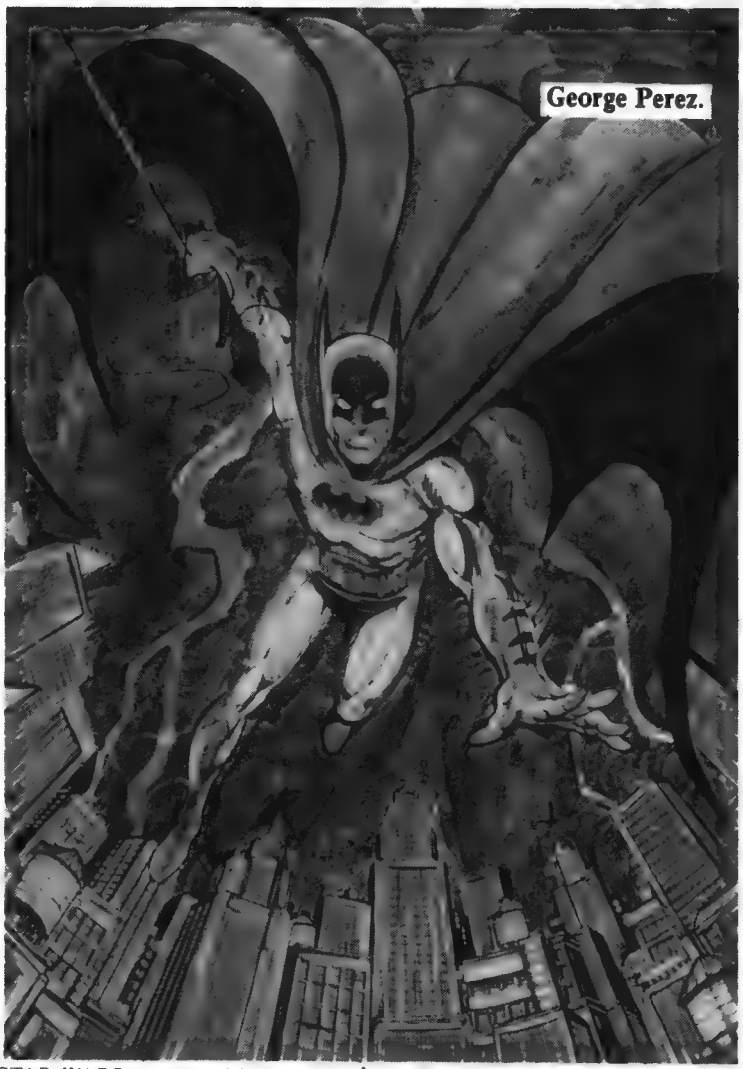
TODD: Right. It's on the **Byrne** piece, it's on that piece, it just shows up every so often.

DARREL: *And on this one Batman's cape spreads out in an interesting effect.*

TODD: And it's a *terrific* coloring job he did, also.

DARREL: *Next, Howard Chaykin. It looks like a pretty quick sketch.*

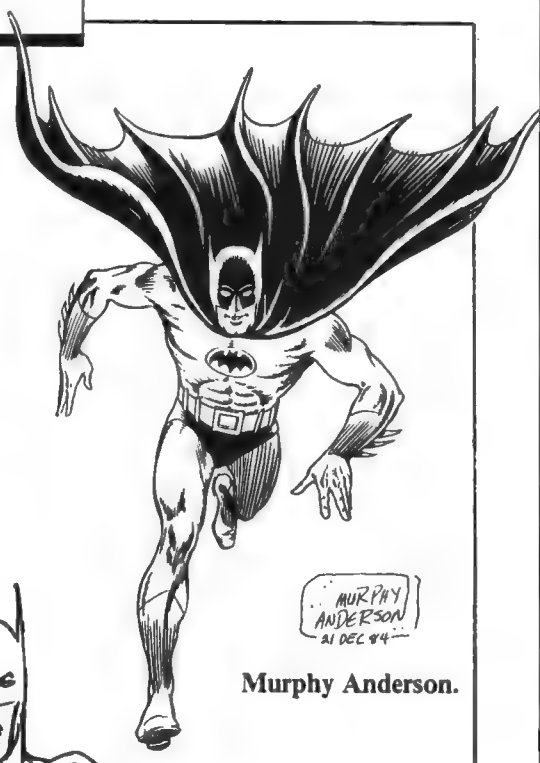
TODD: That's *exactly* what it was, a *very* quick sketch. Oddly enough, back in 1977 he was doing the STAR WARS comic book, and he had a pre-publicity STAR WARS poster, and he gave me some posters to do a 3-D of them. I did the 3-D, but I still have it — well, it's at my folks' house. At the time that I did it, I didn't even know who Luke Skywalker or Darth Vader were. Nevertheless, I



George Perez.

Jerry Ordway.

Howard Chaykin.



Murphy Anderson.

Jerry Bingham.

"I did a 3-D of DETECTIVE #457 — the Batman head."

Sergio Aragones.

showed it to him the following year and it was just too big for him to take back to New York, so he allowed me to *keep* the 3-D on top of giving me a page from one of his DOMINICK FORTUNE stories; and, of course, when I asked him to do the Batman, he gave me that quick sketch.

DARREL: *Next we have Murphy Anderson, Batman running with a smile on his face, another stock type of shot.*

TODD: It's a stock type of shot, pretty much what he might have done when he was doing JUSTICE LEAGUE over **Sekowsky.** He's an artist that I grew up reading in the '60s, and I've long admired his fine ink style. Again, it's a very simple piece, but I treasure it because it's **Murphy Anderson.**

DARREL: *And it's very nice — sometimes simple is better.*

TODD: Right. As an art teacher friend of mine once said, less is more. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Okay. Next, a very interesting piece by Mike Zeck, Batman standing atop a building. It's like he's standing guard.*

TODD: Yes. I think I did a PUNISHER 3-D for him . . . no, it was Captain America versus the Destroyer, I think. Anyway, he reciprocated by doing this piece, and this was long before he did the NIGHTS OF THE BEAST covers. It's a very *proud* Batman looking out over Gotham City.

DARREL: *This next one is the guy you don't want to meet in a dark alley. This is Batman with his fists clenched, teeth gritted, very angry looking, by Jerry Bingham.*

TODD: Right. Again, a fairly quick sketch, one I bought from Jerry. I haven't been able to work out a trade, but he admires my work and my magic — I was doing magic this year for him at the San Diego con. I loved what he did in the graphic novel he did with **Mike Barr.** I *had* to have something by him in my collection.

DARREL: *Next, a very funny curiosity by Sergio Aragones.*

TODD: I have done a number of 3-Ds for Sergio for cash, and this is a little cartoon he did for me because I had been after him to do Batman for my collection. A hell of a nice guy, very charismatic. I think he might have drawn this once before for MAD when they were doing spoofs of superheroes.

Michael Zeck.

"Obsidian is Todd Rice. He was born and raised

DARREL: *I really like this next one, it has a nice feeling of depth, by Bruce Patterson — and again, Batman's gonna kick you in the face.*

TODD: Right, coming down right on top of you. Somebody once complained, "What's Batman doing with shoes on?" He thought he wore spandex all around. (Laughter.)

DARREL: *Well, you live in a cave —* (Laughter.)

TODD: Nevertheless, this is a *very* nice piece. He's known predominantly as an inker in the business, and this is when he was working at First Comics. He's also a hell of a nice guy. I like the way he did the lighting effect like the light is shining *up* on Batman as he's coming down.

DARREL: *It really gives a nice feeling of depth to this piece. Plus there's a sense of motion as well, he put in a few motion lines.*

TODD: Yes.

DARREL: *This next one I really like but I don't know how well it will reproduce, by Mike Sekowsky.*

TODD: It's a very *strange* piece. I had met Mike a couple of times, but had never worked out a deal with him, and at the time he was working at Hanna-Barbera with **Scott Shaw.** So the deal was I did another 3-D for **Scott Shaw** and he got me an original **Sekowsky** piece. Now, it's very awkward, very menacing, very strange, with a lot of broken TV antennas all over the roof that he's jumping over, running over — which, when you think about it, with all of the TV antennas on roofs, would be natural. Again, he's someone that I admired from my childhood, when I was reading JUSTICE LEAGUE during my formative years. It may not be an *exceptional* piece, but it's a piece I treasure. It's a shame he passed away.

DARREL: *Yes. I grew up on his JUSTICE LEAGUEs too, which I really loved. The odd thing here is the expression, it looks like Batman has been possessed or something.*

TODD: Yes, it's a very *evil* looking face.

DARREL: *And next we have the WORLD'S FINEST team by Curt Swan.*

TODD: Again, one of the classics that I grew up with, I've always loved **Curt Swan's** art. And again, an *extremely* wonderful person. I went and visited him at his apartment up in Connecticut a couple of years ago. I did a WORLD'S FINEST 3-D for him, and of course I wanted a Batman, but I couldn't ask him for something without Superman as well. It's a very nice pencil piece. **Joe Rubinstein** was after me to let him ink this, but I just felt it would be a sin to ink over pencils that are this beautiful.

DARREL: *Yes. The thing that's kind of strange to me is Batman appears larger than Superman. Maybe it's the perspective, because their heads seem on the same level but Batman is swinging with his body forward and Superman is flying with his body back — but Batman does seem to take up more space.*

TODD: I didn't notice that, but Batman was the prime thing to me for my collection. *(Laughter.)*

Bruce Patterson.

Mike Sekowsky.

in Milwaukee, as was I — it's an in-jo[illegible]."

DARREL: *Well, I don't think it's a detraction, I just find it interesting.*

TODD: Right.

DARREL: *Next we have Nestor Redondo.*

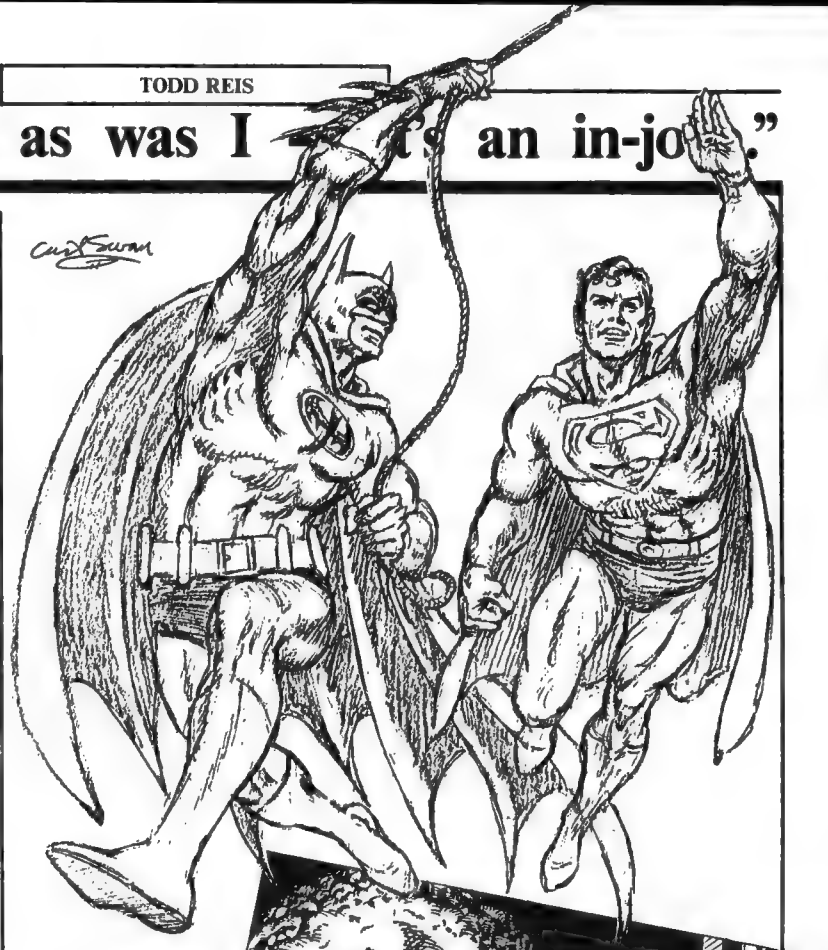
TODD: Again, this took me about a year to collect. I had done a 3-D for him using color Xeroxes of an interior page of . . . RIMA? I can't remember the book. But it was some type of jungle scene. And he reciprocated by doing this, Batman and Robin charging forward. A very nice piece and a very nice man.

DARREL: *This next piece by Dan Jurgens is really fascinating, with the nice reflecting buildings.*

TODD: Yes. It's not so much the Batman as it is the buildings, because Batman is a relatively small figure. Is there an eagle on that building? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *I can't see one.*

TODD: The nice thing, as you said, is the buildings, the reflection of one building in the mirrorlike windows of another building. Dan put a lot of thought into the perspective on that. And I like the other touches, like you can see someone looking out a window at the bottom right. And if anybody knows Minneapolis, this is based on a Minneapolis skyline.



Curt Swan.

Nestor Redondo.

Dan Jurgens.

"As far as the cape goes — the original Bob Kane

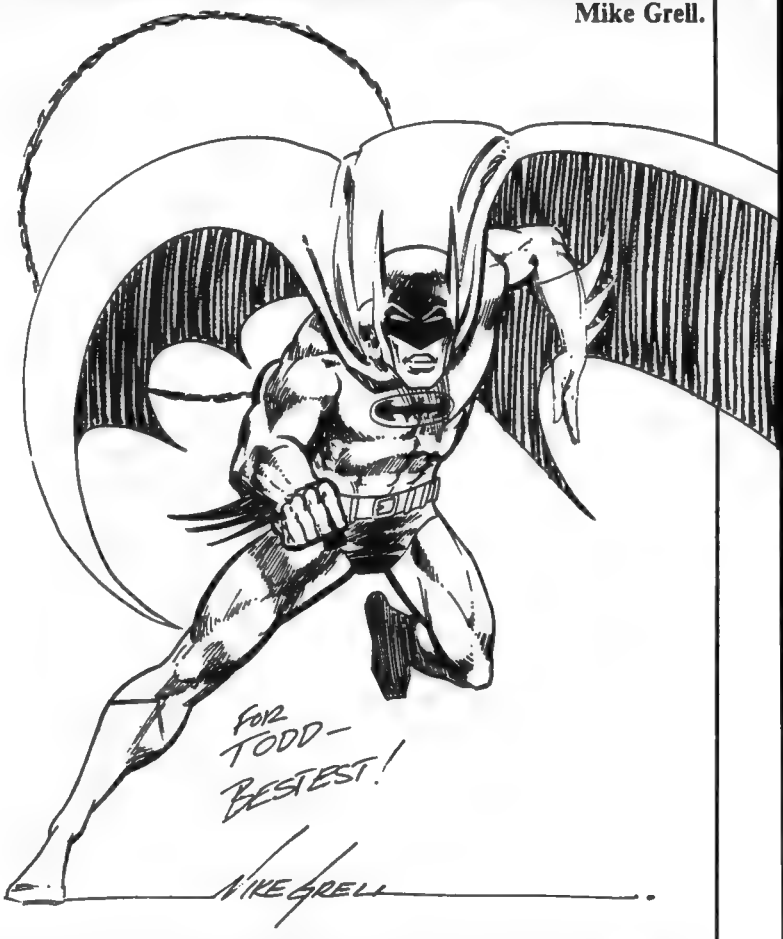
DARREL: *Next we have the Dick Giordano piece. This one looks like Batman is gonna kick you in the face.*

TODD: Right, like he's swinging down right on top of you. I had done one or two 3-Ds for Dick . . . actually, I did a 3-D of DETECTIVE #457, the one he did where it's a shot of Batman's head and you see into his head to Crime Alley. I did that 3-D a second time for myself because I liked it so much. This piece took me two years to get because he wanted to take his time and color it. He's so busy that he didn't have a lot of time to spare. But he was doing something he rarely got the chance to do, had a lot of fun doing it.

An interesting thing about this is a few years after he did this, or within a year, he came out with a book on how to draw comics. I don't know if anybody's seen that, but he had a number of generic characters on the cover. There's one that is this *exact* pose down to the muscles, but it's not Batman. It's the character in a different costume, because he couldn't use established characters. This was just before he became VP at DC.

DARREL: *This next one looks like it could have come straight out of BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS, by Jim Aparo.*

TODD: Right, a longtime favorite of mine. I really liked the work he did on the early SPECTRE series and in DETECTIVE for awhile. He's also a *wonderful* guy, and very generous. At one time I did a collage for him, a 3-D of various characters that he did, the Phantom Stranger, Aquaman, Batman. I did one or two other pieces — and I've stayed at his house twice, so that's a very special piece to me. I really admire his work, and I've always felt he was very underrated.



Mike Grell.

Jim Aparo.

DARREL: *Next we have Mike Grell, Batman running.*

TODD: I've done a number of 3-Ds for Mike, also. That was the first piece I traded him for. I've also received original covers from him, and a Warlord piece that he did for me. This is just a very simple piece of Batman running. He did that at about the same time that he was working on the four issues of BATMAN.

DARREL: *And next we have a very nice Batman portrait by Joe Kubert.*

TODD: Right, another quick sketch. I had done a RAGMAN 3-D for him — I met him at the San Diego Con and I also interviewed him for a newsletter for a comics store I frequented. Again he's somebody I grew up with and I admire his style. I wish he could have done more, but I'm satisfied with this.

It's interesting in that sometimes artists, depending on their egos I guess, have done things basing on time; like, I put in a lot of effort on the 3-D I did for **Wrightson,** and **Wrightson** put in a lot of effort on the piece he did for me. On the

Batman — it was not so much a cape as a wing."

On Bob Kane's piece: "This was done back in '78."

other hand, some artists have reciprocated in value; where my 3-D would be *x* amount of dollars, they'll give me something worth *x* amount of dollars. So, it can go either way. Sometimes it's worked out for the better; sometimes it's worked out so-so. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Next we have the eagle showing up again in a piece by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez.*

TODD: Right, a classic pose originally from UNTOLD LEGEND OF THE BATMAN with him just swinging straight forward; it was reprinted on the

Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez.

"I've made off quite well with this collection."

Bob Kane.

DC calendar last year and also redone on a few T-shirts I've seen around. *(Laughter.)* But nevertheless, it's a classic pose, I asked him *specifically* for that pose because I had done a 3-D of that cover for him. It's a marvelous, wonderful piece.

DARREL: *This next piece your collection would not be complete without, a Bob Kane.*

TODD: Yes. This was done back in '78. He was at the San Diego Con and I managed to corner him up in his room, spent about a half-hour with him. At the time I had done a 3-D of the DETECTIVE #27 cover from that giant tabloid reprint of it. He took it back to New York, but I heard it got damaged. I offered to fix it, but I never heard back from him. Now he's living out here somewhere, but I've never really connected up with him. Bob, if you're reading this, get in touch.

DARREL: *Well, I understand he's been pretty busy this year.*

TODD: Yeah, right. *(Laughter.)* But nevertheless, this is basically a quick sketch, simple head shots of Batman and Robin. But the interesting thing is that I was at an art gallery last weekend and saw his originals for sale. There were several colored pieces that were going from between $5,000 to $8,000. Now granted, Batman is currently *hot,* and also a mall gallery has a certain markup that they have to tack on, but I had thought this picture I have was only worth $100 to $200. Now I would have to say it would be worth a lot more than that. And you're right, it does make the collection complete, although I wish I had an original by Jerry Robinson as well.

DARREL: *What enjoyment is it that you get out of collecting all of this Batman art?*

TODD: It makes *my* art that much more special to me. Seeing the art and knowing that *my* art made it possible for me to collect all of this, and made it possible for me to meet most of these people whose names I've seen in the comic books, whose art has blown me away — and deal with them on a one to one level. It's not just seeing the art and enjoying it, which I do, but it also brings back memories. It's *more* than just an art collection.

DARREL: *It's kind of like a piece of you, or you become a piece of it or something.*

TODD: Right.

DARREL: *Well, I guess that's about it unless there's anything else you can think of?*

TODD: If anybody is interested in contacting me about my 3-D art, especially any artists that would like to work out any trade, I would be more than happy to hear from you. And since I now have practically all of the pieces documented on slides, if a club would want to see a slide show and I'm in the area, I'd be more than happy to give a presentation and talk about the collection and my 3-D art.

My artwork I do because I enjoy it. It's like doing a jigsaw puzzle, and I'll always continue to do 3-D work. I've made off quite well with this collection. And if I were ever to *sell* this collection now would be the time to strike with the big Batman craze — and sell it as a whole — but I have no intention of doing so. On one hand, I wish more people could see it, but in a way I rather like hoarding it. *(Laughter.)*

"LEGENDS is Batman's *first* adventure."

ED HANNIGAN: Do you understand the premise of the LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT series?

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *Well, frankly, no.*

ED: With all of the hoopla and all, they seem to have somehow forgotten to tell people what the actual premise of the series is. The premise of the series is that this is *supposed* to be coming right on the heels of BATMAN: YEAR ONE. In fact, the first issue of this *overlaps* BATMAN: YEAR ONE, this is Batman's *first* adventure.

You'll notice the symbol on his chest without the circle, and there's no Robin — this is *early* Batman. This is why some people may be saying, "Gee, his Bruce Wayne doesn't quite look like Bruce Wayne." It's because I'm trying to draw a younger, *greener* Bruce Wayne who hasn't yet matured into the Batman that everybody knows about. So, that's the basic premise.

DAK: *Is that the premise for just your five-issue series?*

ED: I *think* it's the premise of the whole series. I could be wrong, but it seems crazy to break it off. I think they're going to try to establish their own very *loose* continuity, and if they have stories happening now — well, it seems to me that it would be interfering with the current continuity.

DAK: *Well, how does it feel to be doing, in effect, Batman's first adventure? Did you ever think that this would come to pass?*

ED: No, I never did. And it's kind of neat, although . . . I don't know if you read BATMAN: YEAR ONE or not —

DAK: *Yeah.*

ED: To me BATMAN: YEAR ONE is everything a comic book should be — it's *un*surpassed! As far as I'm concerned that's *really* Batman's first adventure, I'm just kind of filling in the little crevices and stuff. But, you know, it feels neat to be doing Batman.

DAK: *When I heard that you were the artist on it —*

ED: Total fluke.

DAK: *Yeah, I couldn't figure out how*

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"They were fooled into thinking I was a hot top artist."

that came to pass. I mean, nothing to do with your ability, but you're not a name associated with Batman.

ED: No, not at all. I was doing GREEN ARROW, which was and probably still is one of DC's better-selling titles, and I guess they were fooled into thinking I was a hot top artist. *(Laughter.)* I don't consider myself to be a hot top artist, except for the fact that I just happened to be on two books in a row that are top books — so maybe I could say the fact that I was on them had something to do with their success. But I almost think that anybody could have done GREEN ARROW with **Grell** writing it and it probably would have done well, because LONGBOW HUNTERS did so well, because **Grell** is so popular.

Anyway, I was sitting with **Andy Helfer** and I think it was **Terri Cunningham** at lunch, eating greasy corned-beef sandwiches, and we were just talking and griping and grousing about comics and stuff — gotta make more money, gotta do this and that. And Andy said, "You know, we're going to start a new BATMAN series, would you want to do the first five issues?" At first, I thought he was talking about a limited series, a mini-series type thing, and I thought, "Oh, that would be neat." I was getting a *little* tired of GREEN ARROW — although I must say that I remember it affectionately and I had a lot of fun on it, it was neat to do.

LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT just sounded interesting. I really didn't know anything about it — and had no idea it was going to be this super hot. They talked me into it. They said, "It's going to be hot, it's going to be big!" and I was saying, "Yeah, sure, I've heard *that* before." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Isn't it just about the best-selling book they've ever done?*

ED: It's *huge!* Well, I think **Byrne's** SUPERMAN #1 probably was bigger, I think that actually topped a million.

DAK: *Are the final sales in on your first issue?*

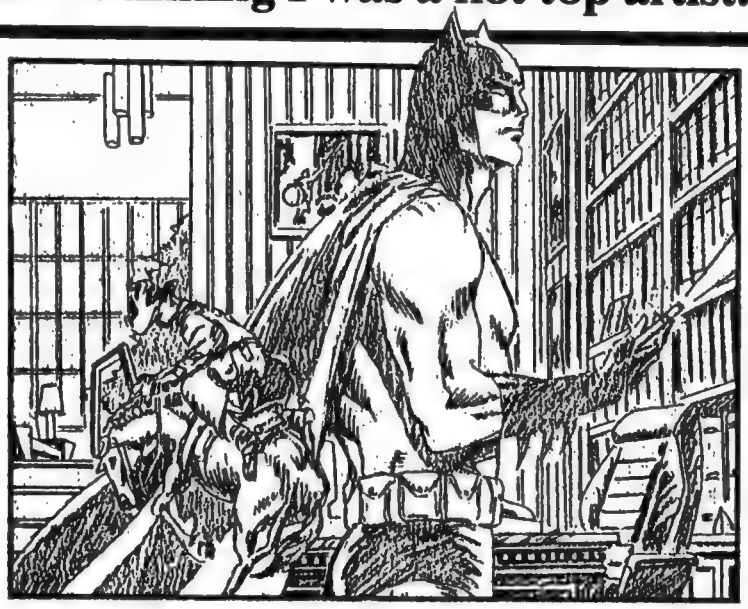
ED: Yeah. The final sales, as far as I know, were 960,000.

DAK: *I think that's close enough to call it a million.*

ED: It's close.

DAK: *In cocktail conversation I think you could say —*

ED: They should just say, "Ah, what the hell, Ed, it's a million and we'll give you the royalties for a million." *(Laughter.)* But I'm sure they'll have it counted down to the last penny. Anyway, it's fun, it's *neat!* It came at the time when we moved from New York to Vermont, and then we found a house in New Hampshire, and we also had a baby. Jeanne Ann was born at about page 10 of the third issue. *(Laughter.)* I rushed Heidi to the hospital and I didn't touch the book again for a week.



DAK: *Is there a change in the art style there?*

ED: There might be! I don't think so, because my art style is so weird and erratic that it's hard to tell.

And also, I don't do . . . well, I don't know how much I should tell of my little secrets, but oftentimes I don't do the book in order. Like, if I have to send them some pages — in the old days when I lived in Manhattan I would just hop on the subway and dodge bullets and make sure that nobody knifed me in the back, and just go into the office and hand them pages. If I had to Xerox something there, I could. But here you *must* Xerox things before five o'clock, and you *can't* do it on the weekend, because this is the sticks, and *then* you have to get to the Federal Express box. So, to make a long story

"Jeanne Ann (r) was born at about page 10 of the third issue."

"Marvel style was always a crap shoot."

short, sometimes I'll have to get them more pages and I'll slip through the story and try to do a real easy page, like with Bruce and Alfred talking. *(Laughter.)* I know I can whip that out real fast in time for the deadline. So, I don't do them in order.

Also, sometimes I just get stuck on a page. One page in the first issue — the page where they're robbing the old lady's clinic for drug money — that took me *three* days! When I look at it, I say, "Why was this page more difficult than the other pages?" It really wasn't, but for some strange reason — it was like a little mental block. So, if it goes on too far I'll just dump it and go on to another scene, and come back.

DAK: *Well, does this not wreak havoc with the scripter? How does Denny write a page out of sequence?*

ED: It's full script, like a little movie script, which is good for me because I can go through and check ahead and check back. Also, I do a certain amount of rearranging. For instance, in issue #2 there's a big full-page splash of Batman leaping across a building, and that wasn't in the script. Actually, I guess it was in the script as a little panel or something.

But I was a bit nervous because Batman hadn't appeared, by page 13 Batman hadn't made an appearance yet. So, I figured it would be nice to have a big, dramatic Batman. What I had to do was steal panels — like, if it was a seven-panel page, I'd put *eight* panels in it, and the next page I'd swipe two from the next page, until I had a free page just by scrunching up other pages. I get to do that with a full script, as long as I don't go totally hog wild — or I'll shift a balloon, you know, from one panel to another, or even from one page to the next page.

DAK: *Well, I don't know how you were working with Grell, but —*

ED: The same way more or less.

DAK: *— back in those incredible ancient old days at Marvel, when you and I did THE DEFENDERS, we always worked Marvel style, so called.*

ED: Right. I haven't worked Marvel style in a long time, I'm not even sure I could still do it. I prefer this way now.

DAK: *Really?*

ED: Yeah, because Marvel style was always a crap shoot on *everybody's* part. The scripter would write out a big plot and then if the artist was inspired or real good he would do a great story, but if he *wasn't* he'd do a mediocre story. Or the artist would do all of these great pages and then hope against hope that the script would be *fantastic*, but maybe the scripter had a bad day. You never knew until the end what the thing was going to read like. Of course, if I did a few stories that way I might change my mind and say, "Yeah, this is really great."

DAK: *I always thought it added spontaneity to the story.*

ED: Well, it's great if you have an artist and a writer who are in tune with each other and can communicate and know what they're doing. Then you can really have that kind of magic.

DAK: *That sort of makes it sound like you and Denny O'Neil* aren't *in tune.*

ED: Well, I live in New Hampshire, he lives in New York, we more or less work through Andy. He wrote a bunch of scripts and sent them to me. The only time we discuss anything is if we have a problem.

DAK: *Any examples?*

ED: Well, if you remember the first scene in the book, this knife thing, the clue — I *didn't* draw the knife in the early scene because I had to have the Indian holding the rifle in his hand. Bruce has to be left with no resources whatsoever, so every-

"Some clever readers will know who it is — I didn't."

body who had a pack or a rifle or *anything*, everything had to go over the cliff, so he could be left just standing there in his sweater. Well, Denny had the Indian that he was fighting pull out a knife, threaten him with the knife, but in order to do that — he's holding Bruce at the throat with his other hand — he'd have to put the rifle down or something. So I just said, "What the hell, he doesn't *have* to be holding the knife — if he's already saying he's going to cut him then why does he have to be holding the knife?"

Well, the reason was that later on that knife turned out to be a visual clue for the reader! By the time they read this interview they'll know that the Indian who they thought was dead in the first scene is actually one of the big villains, and the readers find out because they see that knife. But since I didn't *draw* the knife in there, they *wouldn't* find out. So, we went back and forth and decided that I'd give him some fringed boots that were the same as the fringed boots he was wearing in the first scene, so *that* was a bit of a clue. And I had Andy add one little word balloon, three words, which was reminiscent of the way he was talking in the first scene, so you could sort of put it together from there.

You actually find out quickly afterwards, it doesn't really matter if you guess, anyway. Like, some clever readers will know who it is and others — like myself, I didn't know until I got the third script — will say, "Oh, *that* guy!" *(Laughter.)* It would have been nice if Denny had told me this guy was going to come back.

DAK: *Yeah. He was scripting it as you were drawing it, he didn't do five scripts so that you knew where you were going with the story?*

ED: He did one script and then he did another script, and then he did the last three, the last three all came together.

DAK: *And then you knew where you were going with the story?*

ED: Yes, yes. But then there are little things, too, because I don't go through and memorize the script; so I can make strange little mistakes. Some of them I don't know if anybody would notice, but there's one scene in which a car hits a truck, and the car later on turns out to be a rental car. I didn't really realize that, so I drew this '59 Chevy. *(Laughter.)* But it's in Alaska and — I don't know, I've never been to Alaska, but I have *lots* of photos — they have all of these old junky cars and trucks. I figured there's probably a reason why there's lots of old junky cars and trucks in Alaska, like maybe it costs too much to ship new ones or something.

DAK: *Well, you've heard of Rent-A-Wreck? That's where they got the car!*

ED: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's the kind of thing like when you're out in the country, it's not like California or someplace where everything is modern and new. If you have a '53 Ford pickup truck and it's in running order and you can get parts for it, there's no reason why it can't go 30 years.

DAK: *Hey, that's my philosophy.*

ED: People do that. And, you know, Alaska, rural places, it's the same kind of thing; if you want to rent a car it's not like you have Avis right there and you get yourself a brand new Caddy or something.

DAK: *No, no, in fact I can justify this for any of those readers who might be bothered. Do you remember the four-wheel drive jeep that I have?*

ED: Right.

DAK: *Well, in taking it to the mechanic to get the transmission fixed, the mechanic fixed it, all right, but when I brought it home the jeep burst into flames and burned — which is always exciting, especially when you're* in *it.* (Laughter.) *But —*

ED: Wasn't it built even before Chrysler owned the company?

DAK: *Right, right. But anyway, we tried to find a vehicle to rent in the meantime, went to a local garage —*

ED: Some guy that's got a bunch of cars.

DAK: *Yeah. Guess what, he rented us an old car for a month.*

ED: Sure, exactly.

DAK: *So it's perfectly logical.*

ED: I never should have brought it up. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, in your time you wrote stories for Marvel. I don't think you've ever written for DC —*

ED: One story, which had no dialogue in it, though, so it was easy to write. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I'm waiting for the issue that you*

"It's like H.L. Mencken said, 'One man's

draw that has no art.

ED: Byrne already did that. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, the question that I have is: I know from hanging around with you and from talking to Denny, and from reading both of your stories and so on, that you guys have different philosophies of life, as it were.*

ED: Totally, *diametrically* opposed, at least 180 degrees.

DAK: *So, how does that work in collaborating? Do things ever kind of rub the wrong way?*

ED: I don't think so, because . . . here's the way I look at it: I feel that the story belongs to the writer, pretty much, and if I really objected *strongly* to anything in the story, I would not draw it at all. As long as he doesn't make it, like . . . oh, I don't know, it would have to be extremely horrible for me to just refuse to draw it. If he did a story that said killing little babies and kitty cats was okay with him, I might say, "I have a cat and I have a little baby, I don't think I want to draw this story."

What he has in here that I don't like is, I don't like mysticism — but I look at mysticism as sort of a mainstay of comics, like a ghost story or something. I'm not crazy about it, but I don't object to it so much. I object to it in real life, if people try to explain things through mysticism; or any of this "New Age" stuff, I get real impatient with it. But if it's a story element, then it doesn't bother me that much. If he did a story — which I don't think he would do, by the way — that was completely totally pro-communist or something, I'd say, "No, no, no!"

But actually Denny is pretty much — I don't want to put words in his mouth — but I think he's a liberal, you know. I'm more a conservative, although that oversimplifies it, because I'm more sort-of libertarian. He might actually be approaching being a libertarian from the *other* direction, which I notice some people in comics are doing. I always considered **Mike Gold** to be your classic weak-kneed liberal type, a lefty, but actually he's sort of approached the same philosophy I have, only from the other direction. So, even though Denny and I don't agree — I mean, we would probably *never* vote for the same guy — that doesn't really get in the way of doing a story together. He has the right to express *his* opinion.

DAK: *Let me get more specific with the question: There are those who say that, in effect, the LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT story has done some-*

Above (l, r): A rare glimpse of Ed's layouts and pencils.

religion is another man's horselaugh.'"

thing major —

ED: Which is?

DAK: *Which is to subvert the whole character of the Batman. Granted, it isn't mysticism per se, but Superman isn't responsible for having acquired his powers, he's gifted with them — but Batman was always the rational self-made man and the detective, no hint of mysticism in him. And yet here is a story going back to the roots of the Batman which more-or-less transplants mysticism right into his origin, thereby subverting the whole character.*

ED: Well, I don't think it transplants mysticism into his origin. I mean, it's not like . . . I don't know. I don't agree that it does. I don't think it really *changes* his origin, it just shows another side of his origin, or puts a new light on it.

Look at it this way: Batman trained for years and years to do things, he trained himself physically and mentally, and — even though I don't believe in any of this stuff — I think if I were setting out to become Batman I would not ignore anything, like strange, mysterious philosophies of the East. In the position of Batman I wouldn't pooh-pooh them, because there *might* be something to them to explore.

DAK: *Does Batman become mystic?*

ED: No no no no no no no. Only in the most minor way. I think what Denny did was in the classic ghost story "is it or isn't it?" tradition, you know what I mean? "You be the judge." Did Batman really get healed by the weird shaman's magic, or did he just get a chance to get warm and his natural immune system took over? None of it's proven. When you look at it really, nothing in mysticism ever *is* proven empirically.

DAK: *Or it wouldn't be mysticism.*

ED: Right, it would be science. By definition, mysticism is something that is unprovable — or unproven, at least. It requires a certain amount of faith, which is what I object to. I object to things that require faith, you know, like Tinkerbell. "If you believe in her hard enough she will exist." No, either she exists or she doesn't exist. *(Laughter.)* And later on you can find out that she feeds on mental brain waves, that's why it works, and that's fine, I can accept that.

DAK: *I see what you're saying.*

ED: Approach it as a very rational person. You know, I've always scoffed at astrology in any form, and yet I've heard you make little comments about astrology that would lead me to believe that you actually give some credence to it.

DAK: *Well, you could probably ration-*

"Frank and David didn't change so much as amplify."

alize anything.

ED: Well, you could. But to me it's like **H.L. Mencken** said, "One man's religion is another man's horselaugh." What to me is mystical baloney to some other person could be an everyday matter of course. This is sounding awfully a lot like freshmen in college. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, you know, these revampings of the origins of 50-year-old characters have to be deserving of discussion.*

ED: Oh, sure, yeah. I think, actually, it was rather tastefully done. We didn't go in and do something to Batman's origin — we did far less than **Byrne** did with Superman, far far less.

DAK: *Did Byrne actually do* anything *with Superman?*

ED: Well, he changed the look of a lot of stuff, Krypton and stuff, and he did away with everything that had been built up over the years.

DAK: *And then brought it back again.*

ED: Some of it he brought back.

DAK: *Well, if he'd stuck around he'd have brought all of it back.*

ED: He stopped himself before it went too far.

DAK: *I don't know. I miss Krypto the Wonder Dog and Superhorse, I must say.*

ED: Well, that was **Mort Weisinger** tacking stuff onto Superman. But **Byrne** did little changes of relationships, Lois and Clark and stuff like that. I think we did less than he did. He changed the whole look of Jor-El and Krypton in general — maybe his stuff was more like an art director type of choice. Frankly, I like the old stuff better. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Would you say the same thing about Batman, that with all of this modern revamped stuff you liked the old stuff better?*

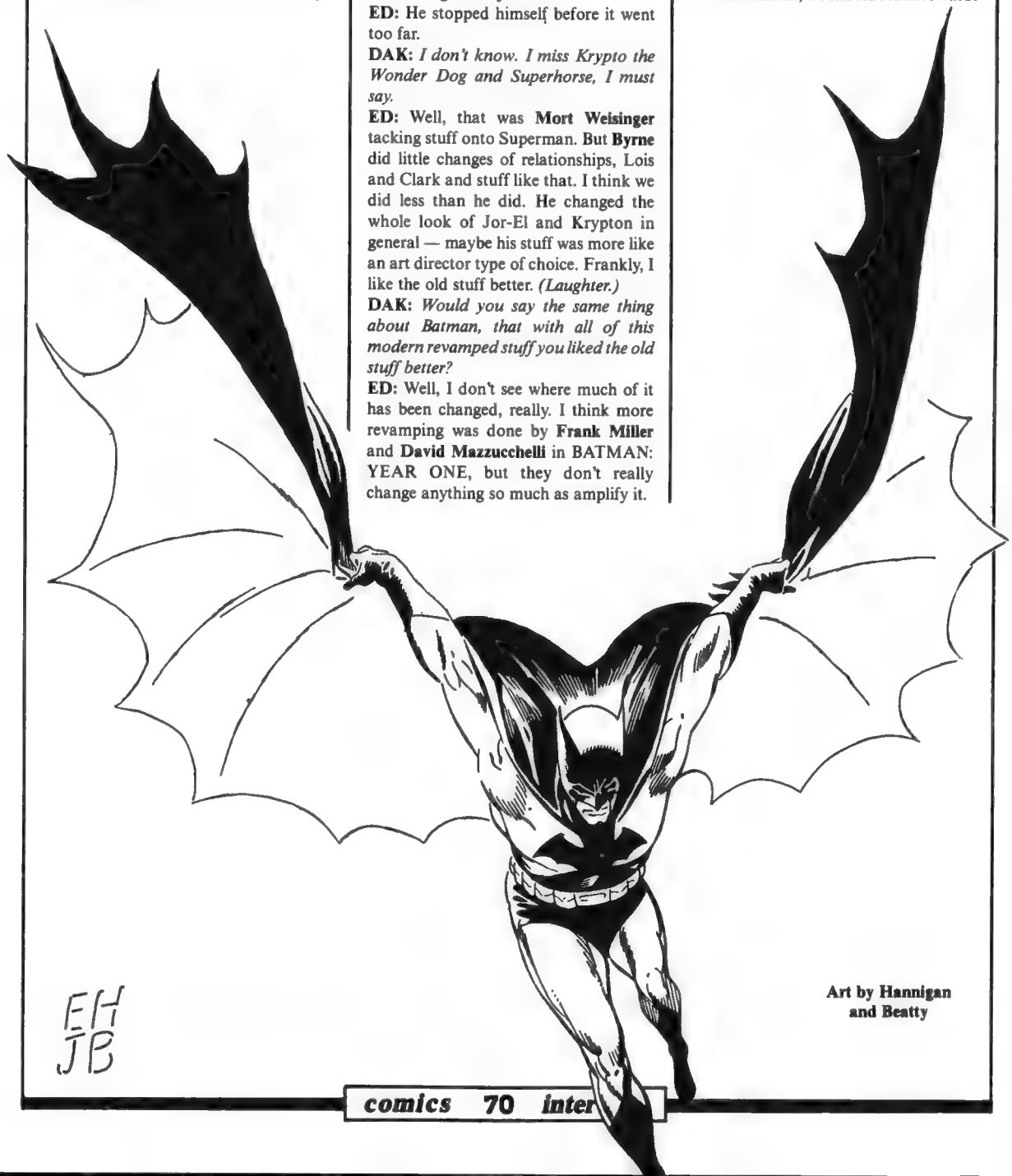
ED: Well, I don't see where much of it has been changed, really. I think more revamping was done by **Frank Miller** and **David Mazzucchelli** in BATMAN: YEAR ONE, but they don't really change anything so much as amplify it.

DAK: *Enhance it.*

ED: Yeah, they explain stuff — where did this come from, where did that come from. And, like I say, I love BATMAN: YEAR ONE. I hold it up as the shining example of "if you have to have superhero comics, this is how they should be done."

DAK: *Why do you say that?*

ED: It's so well written, and I love the illustrations, and . . . I just think it's the way a comic book *should* be done. The bare minimum, we should reach towards



FH
JB

Art by Hannigan and Beatty

The plot : "Crime is up, here comes Batman!"

that. I like the way he had the two narrative voices, Jim Gordon and Batman. He just took something that is intrinsically unrealistic and made it about as plausible as it could be made. In the real world someone who acted like Batman would be some kind of a nut — but he sort of made it seem like he *has* to do this now. He *has* to become this crime fighter, he *has* to inspire fear in the criminals, so he *has* to have the costume — various little things like that.

DAK: *What do you think separates it from so many of the other BATMAN comics that DC has published over the years?*

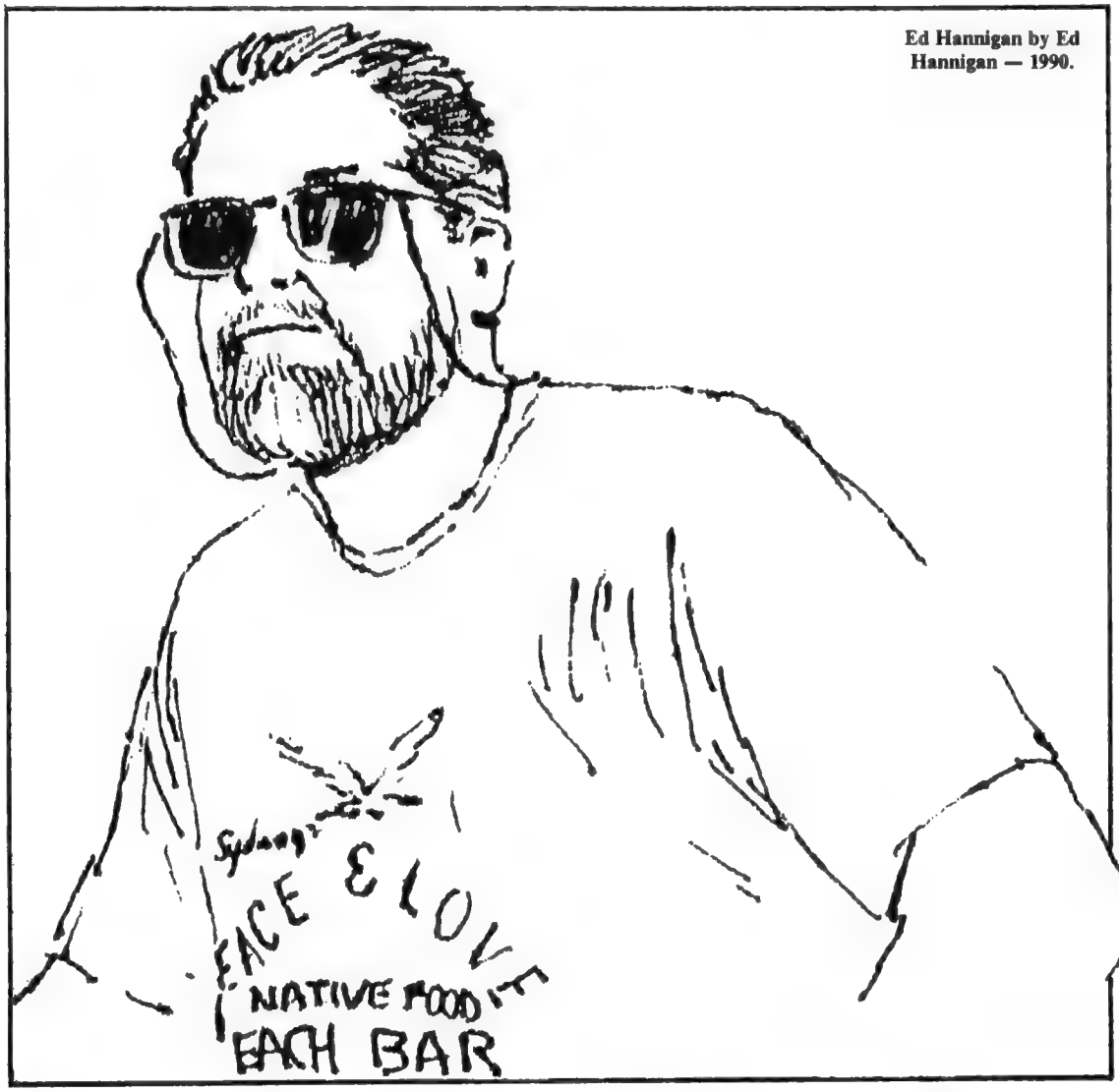
ED: Well, you know, any other BATMAN comic, or SUPERMAN or CAPTAIN AMERICA or SPIDERMAN, it's sort of like . . . it's hard to say, but you really have to suspend your disbelief to a *major* extent. Things are not logical, and things are not thought out on the part of the people doing the comics, for the most part. They're not carefully thought out. The characters tend to be cardboard cutout types, evil people are totally evil, good people are totally good. I can show it to you, but I don't know if I can really point to something and say this is the reason.

DAK: *Before we leave the subject of Frank Miller entirely, what about THE RETURN OF THE DARK KNIGHT, what did you think of that?*

ED: I liked it. I was a little disappointed by the ending. I thought it was pretty nifty, but I didn't think it was as good as YEAR ONE, or even as good as the "born again" DAREDEVILs that he did. But I did like it; visually it was real neat, and it had a lot of surprises. A lot of it, I thought, was just "Here's Frank throwing out all of his ideas." It wasn't as intricately woven, let's say, as a Kingpin **Frank Miller** story. It was more like, "Here comes Batman, he's out with a vengeance, we're going to hit you with both barrels!" But I liked it quite a bit. I mean, really, what's the plot of it? Crime is up, somebody better do something. Here comes Batman! That's the plot of RETURN OF THE DARK KNIGHT.

DAK: *Jim Salicrup says that it's the classic team-up story plot, except done in a more modern approach.*

ED: Yeah. I have to say that I absolutely



Ed Hannigan by Ed Hannigan — 1990.

"I don't want Captain Nemo to battle Martians."

Above, Ed's layout for panel 1 of page 19 (next page).

hated the team-up stuff with Superman in that. Ever since I was a little kid I've felt this way, going against the tide; I never liked team-up books. When I read BATMAN I don't want to be reminded that Superman exists. In BATMAN: YEAR ONE there's one offhanded comment about Superman flying in Metropolis, which I can ignore. I have problems with Superman. I like Superman a lot, but if Superman existed none of these other superheroes would be around, they'd be useless, they'd be superfluous. There'd be no Batman. Superman could fly into Gotham and clean up the crime problem in one day.

What I like about *any* superhero comic is "this is the only guy on Earth who is doing this." If *everybody's* running around in weird tights and funny costumes — which a lot of people seem to like — to me it's boring. I like the fact that here is the ordinary world and yet there's this one guy who's extraordinary and he's doing stuff. So, when they brought Superman into RETURN OF THE DARK KNIGHT, I just didn't like it. I want to read the story of Batman, I don't want to be distracted by other stuff. It's like if they combined 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA with WAR OF THE WORLDS, like if they tried to crossover the **Jules Verne** universe with the **H.G. Wells** universe. WAR OF THE WORLDS, to me that's a world where Martians invaded the Earth and stuff happened — I don't want Captain Nemo to suddenly surface to do battle with the Martians. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *You know Philip Jose Farmer, the science-fiction writer? He's kind of made a career of mixing all of these old characters —*

ED: Yeah. It was sort of fun at first, but after awhile it becomes incredibly incestuous.

TAPE RECORDER: *Beep.*

ED: There's this English comedy show called THE YOUNG ONES. It's basically these four college students who never go to class, and one of them is a hippie, one of them is a punk with pins in his ears and stuff, one of them's a political anarchist type guy, and one of them's a gold chain disco type guy — it's, like, totally surrealistic.

There's one scene when the hippie guy tries to telephone someone, and then later on he meets up and says, "Didn't you get our message?" So the guy pulls out a piece of paper with the message: Beep beep — why do telephones and other machines have to hassle people — why can't we live a totally pastoral existence with peace and brotherhood and machines that don't go beep in your ear?

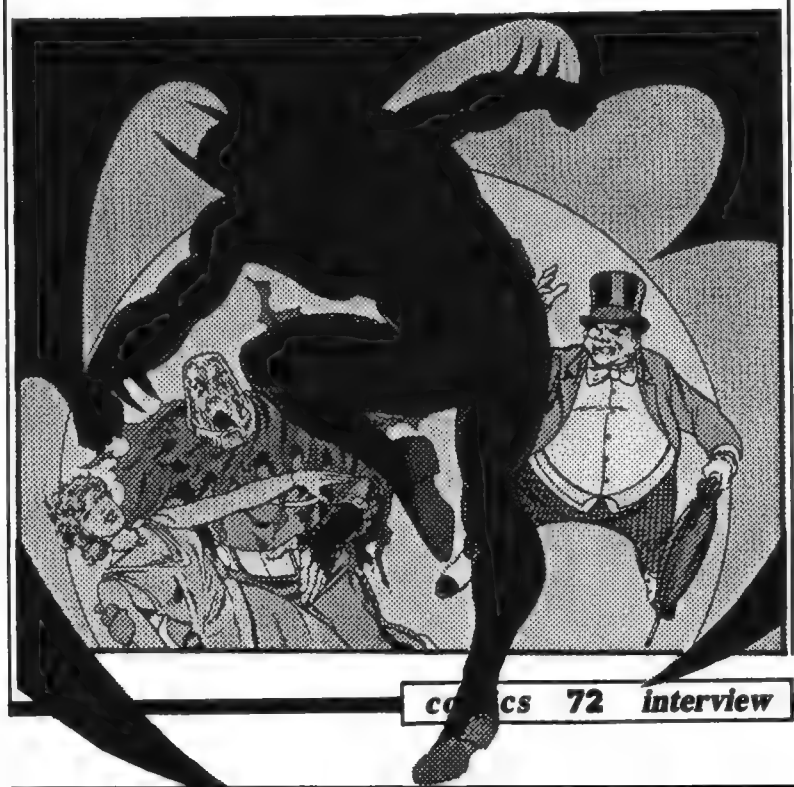
DAK: *You mean this recording machine's every-fifteen-seconds beep is disruptive?* (Laughter.)

ED: It's just that it reminds me of that.

DAK: *Well, what you were saying about the team-up thing and Frank Miller and all of that —*

ED: I wouldn't accuse Frank of that because he doesn't do it that much, or he

Detail of Byrne's BATMAN ANNUAL #11 cover (thanks to Ed).



GUY GEORGE
CITRUS VALLEY

"Hulk was monopolizing the bathroom and stuff."

didn't do it that much. But you get to the point where you have 30 guys running around in costumes, they're doing DYNASTY only everybody's wearing weird skintight costumes. It just seems stupid to me. Remember the SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE bit where they had the big party with all of the superheroes? **Garrett Morris** was Ant-Man, "I have the strength of one man!" **Belushi** was the Hulk and he was monopolizing the bathroom and stuff like that. Well, to me, that's what you come down to. This guy can climb walls, this guy can see through walls, this guy can run up walls — it loses its uniqueness. The great thing about a superhero is that he's got these powers that other people *don't* have.

DAK: *You're bearing out something that I have said for years, which is that I think DC made a mighty huge mistake in trying to imitate the Marvel Universe and coordinate all of their continuity.*

ED: Yes.

DAK: *What I always enjoyed about DC was that it had its own reality that was different from Marvel's, these characters could coexist and not have any continuity between them at all.*

ED: Right. But people won't tolerate that; it's like, "Why the hell didn't Green Lantern show up when blah blah blah." And I can understand that but . . . Actually, this is all going back to the comment when I said "If you have to have superhero comics this is the way they should be done," and I think the crux of that is "If you have to have superhero comics." And apparently, these days, you do. It's unfortunate. The only good thing about it is it's a lot easier to draw people in skintight costumes than it is to draw them in clothing. *(Laughter.)* But other than that, though, it's *bad* that there's got to be some kind of superhero in it or people aren't interested.

DAK: *Well, going back to Frank Miller again — maybe for the final time — in the new DC Universe, the post CRISIS DC Universe, he more-or-less defined the Batman character with YEAR ONE.*

ED: It was YEAR ONE and DARK KNIGHT. It seems like he's done *tons* of them, but he's actually done fewer pages of BATMAN than I've done.

DAK: *But he more-or-less defined the character — here's where the character* starts *and here's where the character* ends *— and you and a lot of other people like that a lot.*

ED: I don't necessarily *accept* that ending.

DAK: *The question is: How do you think your LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT, which sort of attaches onto and somewhat overlaps YEAR ONE, jibes with his viewpoint? Because — I don't think it's a big secret — Frank's probably also got a diametrically opposed philosophy to Denny's, and yet Denny is the architect of this story that interweaves and more-or-less enhances his. Do you see any conflict in that?*

ED: I . . . I don't know. I mean, I'm not so sure . . . I guess I'll have to take your word about Frank's philosophy. This happens all of the time, you know, but people who might be sort of conservative come off as being liberals when they write comics. I think Frank does when he writes a comic. I've heard people say, "Oh, that right wing, fascist Batman!" but to me Batman in his comics came off as a humanist liberal type of character. And if *I* wrote the character it would probably come off that way, too.

But I don't know if this is a *big* conflict. I think that what Frank did in YEAR ONE was to focus more on Jim Gordon and the family life, and he created a whole bunch of supporting

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Ed's pencil piece (for AMAZING HEROES) was later finished by Klaus Janson.

"A couple of panels I swiped for the effect of swiping."

characters — we're not using any of them *except* for Jim Gordon. I don't see any particular conflicts. The character of Batman remains just *Batman,* essentially. So I don't know, you'd have to ask Frank. *(Laughter.)* I don't see any huge conflict there, though.

DAK: *Do you think that this story* adds *anything? When the LEGENDS story is all sewn up — was this story necessary? Does it have a beginning and a middle and an end, and does it in any way, shape or form add anything to the Batman legend?*

ED: It definitely has a beginning and a middle and an end. Does it *add* to the Batman legend? It does a little bit. It adds this Indian shaman aspect, but I don't think that's really a major thing. It gives you a glimpse of the earlier days of Batman — according to our *new* Batman, I mean, as opposed to if you went back and read the comics from 1939 and 1940.

Was it necessary? I don't know. The book is a commercial venture, obviously — and a commercial success. But artistically it's a Batman story. People aren't going to have some amazing revelation, like, "Oh, I never knew *that* about Batman before!" They might see little details here and there and say, "Oh, that's a neat little detail, I never thought of that." But people aren't going to come away from it with a different idea of Batman.

DAK: *Well, where does this story fit?*

ED: Oh, where you are by the end is BATMAN: YEAR TWO, I suppose. The first issue overlaps BATMAN: YEAR ONE, and then the second issue we're at the end of BATMAN: YEAR ONE — I guess at the following winter, actually. YEAR TWO, if I remember it — and I don't remember it that well — sort of just continued on. I have ignorance about BATMAN: YEAR TWO. I remember reading some of them, so I *think* this is sort of in the cracks between YEAR ONE and YEAR TWO.

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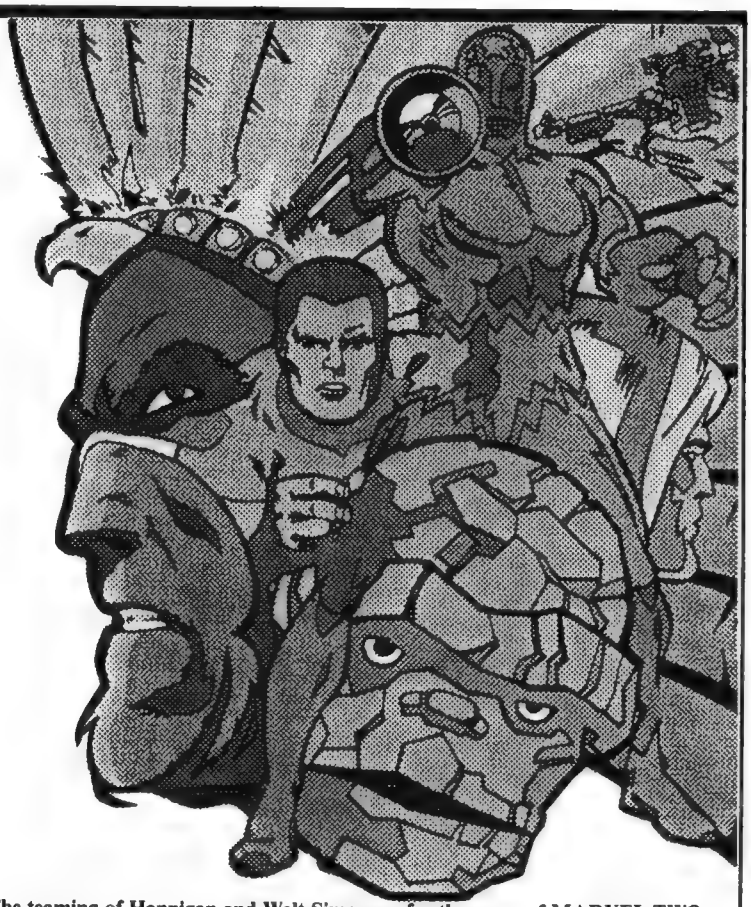


The teaming of Hannigan and Walt Simonson for the cover of MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL #6 (1981).

Artwork by one of Ed's favorite artists, David Mazzucchelli

DAK: *Did you do much research?*

ED: I did lots of research but not on BATMAN. I did research on Alaska, I did research on stuff I had to draw. I didn't do research on BATMAN because I've been reading it all my life.

DAK: *Were you influenced by anybody artistically?*

ED: Well, only insomuch as I'm always influenced by different artists as time goes on. I was influenced a lot by **Mazzucchelli,** but my art and my style don't have any resemblance to **Mazzucchelli's** art and style — except for a couple of panels that I swiped, really, for the effect of swiping them, almost as a touchstone. In the first issue there are, I think, two panels.

Actually it's funny, Andy and I kind of agonized over this, because we do several pages of flashbacks . . . I don't even know if you could call it flashbacks, just simultaneous stuff that happened in BATMAN: YEAR ONE. At first, I was thinking, "Well, I'll just copy them so it'll almost be like watching a movie and here's the videotape of it." But then I decided not to do that — although I

PAGE (1)

GENE: LOTS OF SHADOWS AND BUILDING, ROOF-TOP

Various pieces by Ed . . . clockwise from top left: Cover layout for DETECTIVE COMICS, CLOAK AND DAGGER breakdowns (unpublished), the Bat mask as originally sketched and as it appears in LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT, and a couple of pencil panels from the same.

"He's like Sherlock Holmes only with good muscles."

know I did it in one panel, I might have done it in two. And then I went out of my way to draw the same scenes from different angles, which was kind of fun. Like, you have a police car skidding into a truck and blowing up. I really loved it the way **Mazzucchelli** did it, so I had to go out of my way to do it a different way — it didn't come out as good, it's a little plain. But I did steal one little scene of him sitting in his library.

Anyway, to go back to your question, it's just a matter of the people whose artwork I look at and admire. I try to learn stuff from them. Like **Al Williamson,** I like the way he draws clothing folds and shadows and stuff, so I try to do that sort of thing. But I don't think anybody's going to say, "Gee, his artwork looks so much like **Al Williamson's!**" It doesn't look anything like it. I didn't set out to . . . I sort of know what you mean because you could look at BATMAN: YEAR ONE and say, "Gee, **Mazzucchelli** was influenced by **Alex Toth** and **Milt Caniff** and so forth down the line," because it's very apparent. I think my style is still sort of unformed.

DAK: *I was just wondering if you went into the project with a look or a style in mind?*

ED: Not really. I wanted to make it a little simpler in its drawing, because it's sort of a getting back to the basics thing — which, again, **Mazzucchelli** did. He stripped it down to real basics, which I love. "Here's the basic story!" I just tried to do my normal stuff. It looks different from GREEN ARROW, I think, because the tone is different; and Denny has more panels on the page, which is something I have to deal with. But, of course, I wanted to get a dark, mysterious look to it, so it probably has a lot more shadow and black areas than my stuff normally does.

The scenes that have Bruce Wayne just being Bruce Wayne, with the public, I consciously tried to make them look almost like a romance comic — real open and airy, like Bruce is this bimbo-type character, a spoiled rich kid — and contrast that with Batman, who I tried to make a scarier-than-usual Batman, a little more of an edge. I made him a little darker and a little meaner, because the way I look at it is the Batman now with the yellow thing on his chest is older and wiser and he's mellowed out. The modern day Batman, the yellow-on-the-chest Batman, my favorites would have to be some of those **Neal Adams** ones that were written by Denny and by **Len Wein.** Neal made him look like he was a more

mature guy. He's not a hothead.

DAK: *He's got it down to a formula.*

ED: Yeah! He's like Sherlock Holmes only with good muscles. I tried to make him a little meaner and more fanatical or something.

DAK: *What's the deal with the masks on the covers?*

ED: I wish that could have been coordinated with the stories a little better, some of those covers would have actually gone better with other stories. But, basically, we wanted to come up with something thematic. Andy and I just sat down and we knew we wanted to do five issues in a row that will be a theme, and we knew that we had the bat mask in it because we already had the first script, I was working on it. And Batman wears a mask, so we thought maybe we could do something with masks. It really was just a visual concept.

Under that bat mask on the first issue is Batman, and then under the Batman mask in the third issue is Bruce Wayne, and then under Bruce Wayne there is a skull — it's, like, his empty nothingness. Then the last issue it shows the skull bursting apart and there is the full figure of Batman. But I don't know if I can explain it anymore. It's like if I tried to explain to you the third movement of **Beethoven's** Ninth Symphony. I could probably describe it to you, but describ-

The evolution of a DETECTIVE COMICS cover by Ed.

ing it to you does not explain it to you.

DAK: *It's a very unusual cover. The publicity for it says it's the first new solo Batman book since the original — then you look at the first issue and it has a weird Indian mask on it. It's not the cover you would expect.*

ED: It was a nervous thing but we couldn't think of another way to do it. And, in fact, you can see that the bat mask on the cover doesn't quite look like the one inside. I had already drawn most of the first issue by the time I did that cover, and they said I should make it look a little bit more like a bat. So, I didn't paint that — I can't remember the name of the guy who did — you have to realize

"He is putting on his costume for the *first* time!"

that I know nothing about the comics industry. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Oh, that's not true.*

ED: Ask me about stuff that went on in 1973! So, I made it look a little bit more like a bat. I felt like I should go back and change the whole thing so it was consistent, but I just didn't have the time to do it. I *did* work out the color scheme, even though I didn't paint it; I tried to make it look like if you follow the contours of the mask, the blue area and the other area, to make it look a little bit more like Batman. I think that they probably felt like, "Oh, no, we're starting a brand new Batman book and Batman's not on the first cover!"

DAK: *Or in the book, hardly.* (Laughter.)

ED: Yeah, right. So they decided to put that "protective cover" on it.

DAK: *A-ha!*

ED: Another thing, I do a lot of little things in there which are for my own amusement. There is the scene where Batman first puts on his costume, which to me is a great landmark scene — here he is putting on his costume for the *first* time! But then the next shot where you see him *in* his costume, if you look close enough you'll realize that actually what you're seeing is his reflection in a mirror.

I wanted to have Alfred and Batman both looking out at the reader but I didn't want it to be too contrived, so I figured, "Well, he'd probably look in a mirror." How would he say that Alfred did a good job unless he could see it, he'd *have* to be looking in a mirror! So I figured I'd just show the reflection in the mirror but I wouldn't *show* you. But if you look at it closely you'll see his belt buckle is reversed from that panel to the next, and you can see over to the left of the next panel a little bit of mirror with a reflection of the portraits on the wall —that was a little hint. But it means nothing, it's just an artist playing around.

DAK: *Well, the cover motif stuff, did you pencil the covers and then they were painted by someone else?*

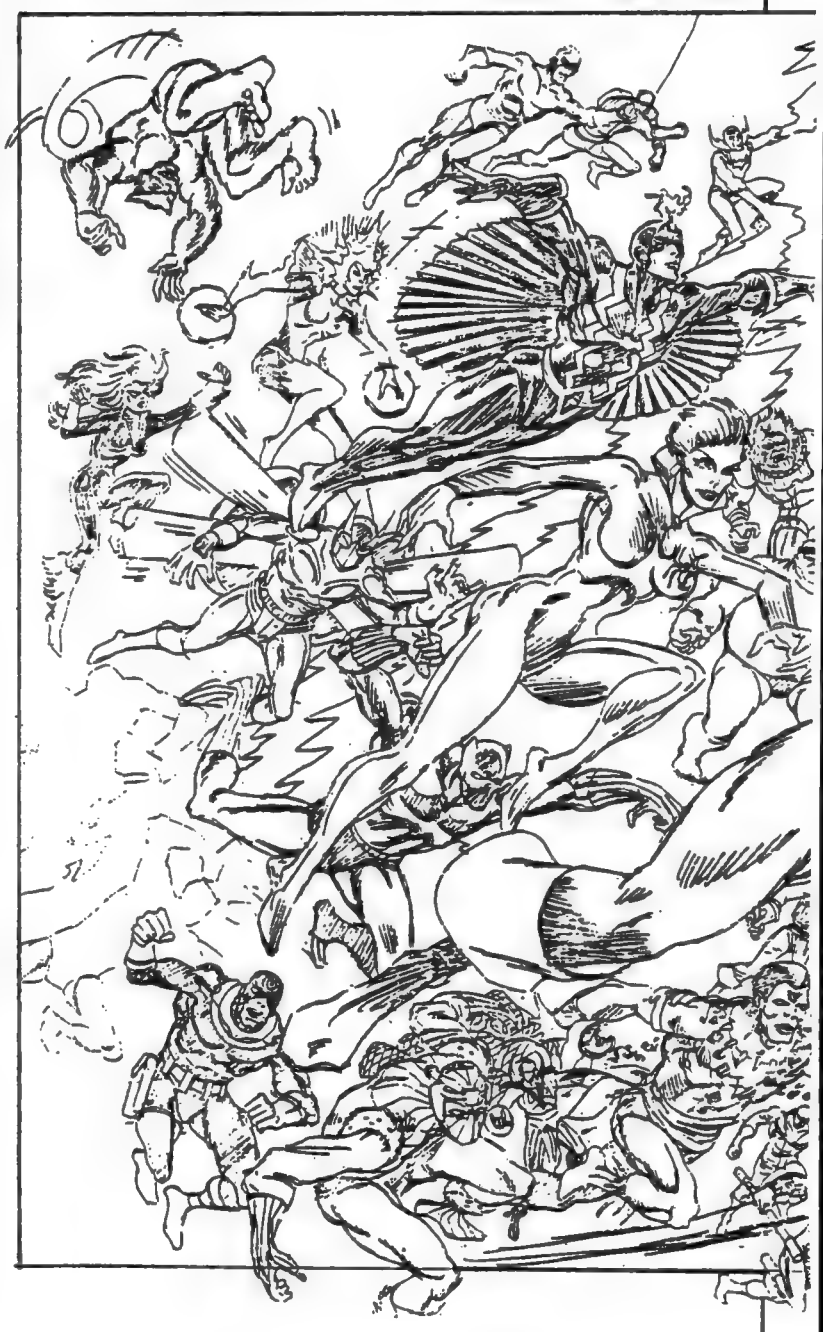
ED: Yes.

DAK: *What did you think about the marketing thing, the first issue being released in four different colors with these protective covers?*

ED: Well, if it works it was genius. *(Laughter.)* That's what I think about it.

But I'll tell you this — I don't want to upset the apple cart too much, but I really think that the collector market in comics is a bunch of bullshit. I can say that with a little bit of experience because my mother was for many years an antique dealer, we would buy and sell antiques and stuff, collectibles. What's happened is . . . there was a collectibles market in those little figurines, little porcelain sentimental sculptures. When they first came out they were handcrafted and very few of them were made, so they were valuable because they were rare, and some people started collecting them . . . it's like Doritos, you know, "Crunch all you want, we'll make more!"

So, lots of people pay money and collect those schlocky figurines now, but they really have no value. All they do is estimate the market and say, "Hm, I think we can sell three million, let's make three million." Now, people who buy them becaue they *like* them, fine, I have no quarrel with them — except I think they have lousy taste. But people who buy them because they think they're going to go up in value and someday they



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"The collector market in comics is a bunch of bullshit."

Wrap-around pencils by Ed for MARVEL UNIVERSE.

can sell them, they're fooling themselves! The only people who will be in the market for those things are other people who are also buying them to someday sell to other people. Well, the same thing is true of comics — "Crunch all you want, we'll make more!"

And so, if you bought four copies of that thing — if you're a completist and you *want* to have the four different colors in your collection, fine. But I seriously doubt that someday they'll be really valuable, in fact I know they won't be. Remember when **Frank Miller** was doing DAREDEVIL — to get back to Frank for a second. People were hoarding copies, they were buying 50 copies of all that stuff. And now you can go into a comics shop and find those **Frank Miller** DAREDEVILs for not much more than they originally cost on the newsstand. There isn't a huge market because there are just too damn many of them.

People don't like to talk about this because, obviously, we're cutting our own throats to say, "No, don't collect them." It's in our interest to make you think that they are collectable. But I would say this, kids — first, don't do drugs. *(Laughter.)* Second, buy comic books if you like them, if you like to *read* them. If you're buying them as an investment, it's a stupid investment, buy savings bonds. As an investment they're lousy. They take up a lot of space, they're hard to lug around, they're really labor intensive when it comes right down to it. If you go to any flea market you'll find people there with boxes and boxes of them, what can I tell you.

This collectible thing really drives me crazy. It drives me crazy to think that people are buying ten issues and sticking them in plastic bags and not reading them. I'll take the money, sure, but I'd rather have kids read the stuff.

DAK: *The way you say kids, I guess you think that's the audience?*

ED: Kids or whatever, old men with pot bellies. *(Laughter.)* I don't care if old men with pot bellies lose their money on this stuff, though. Kids who don't know what they're doing, it's different. Old men with pot bellies, if they're still stupid at that age then I've got no pity.

DAK: *Do you think the cover in four colors was . . . was it just to dress up the newsstand, it looks light and lively, or do you think —*

ED: I think it was that, and I think it was the collectible thing, too. It's one of those things where you go, "If we could do *this*, this would happen and this would happen and this would happen." I know for a fact that people are buying multiples. I've heard from my local comics shop — and let's give them a plug, they're called Comics Etc., owned by **Tim Knowles** in Keene, New Hampshire, and he also has a store in Manchester, and somewhere else but I don't remember where — anyway, they've told me that people are grumbling and complaining, "Oh, why'd they do four covers, now I have to buy four copies." *(Laughter.)* To me that's a real weird psychology.

My feeling is you should go in and say, "Ah, I like the magenta one, I'll buy that." I mean, when I was a kid I would probably have done something dumb like tear off that protective cover thinking, "Well, it's served its purpose." *(Laughter.)* But anyway, if that's what they want to do, that's marketing and bless their little hearts because I'm getting paychecks from this stuff. Far be

"I'll probably never have more talent than I do now."

More beautiful pencil work by Ed (LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT).

it from me to bite the hand that feeds me.

DAK: *Well, where's the next Ed Hannigan project? Would you come back for another stint on BATMAN? And since you used to write comics, too, are you going to become an artiste and an auteur and do all that sort of stuff?*

ED: Yeah, I want to do all that, but I don't know when. As far as coming back on BATMAN, like **John Byrne** said, "Never say never." I have no *intention* of doing it, even though I like the character a lot. I would like to come back and do BATMAN when I'm a more talented artist. Well, I'll probably never have more talent than I do now, the brain cells die more and more every day. *(Laughter.)* But my feeling about it is that I've got two or three years before I'm really a good artist. I could be wrong, maybe I'm over the hill, but I really feel that I

"In the old days we didn't expect to make a living wage."

Various pencil views of the Batman by Ed (detail).

haven't hit my stride and that this stuff should be considered by the legions of **Ed Hannigan** fans to be my early work.

DAK: *But come on now, your early work's been going on for what, ten or fifteen years now?* (Laughter.)

ED: Well, I count it from when I started doing GREEN ARROW. I went through a *long* period of not doing anything but cover sketches. I think I stopped drawing comics in 1979 or something, over at Marvel, and then I stopped writing them around 1980. Except for the occasional work — I drew a couple of comics here and there, a TEEN TITANS ANNUAL, an ATARI FORCE — I didn't do comics for years and years. So I really consider my career to only be three years old. If you're any kind of artist and you don't do it for awhile, you lose it. You pick it up, you remember stuff, but you have to recoup a lot.

DAK: *Well, the business has changed a lot over the years.*

ED: Right.

DAK: *Back in those early days when we were scratching out livings and doing whatever it was at Marvel, the comics field didn't pay very well.*

ED: Yes, I lived in an apartment in Hell's Kitchen and I couldn't even afford the rent 'cause I was only making maybe $25 a week.

DAK: *When you do a book such as LEGENDS that sells a million copies, where does that put you then? Obviously, it's more than $25 — you must be in the big leagues.*

ED: Sort of, not really. Lots of it goes to taxes. Since we just moved, we have to buy furniture. We've had a baby, we have to do stuff. It's not like I'm going to be driving around in a Rolls Royce or anything. However, if it weren't for something like this I couldn't afford to own a house and stuff. Definitely not the big leagues — better off than I was.

DAK: *Well, it's quite a thing, though, when you can do four or five issues of a comic and add a room on the house or something. That's a far cry from just a few years back.*

ED: But in the old days we were all young and we didn't expect to make a living wage, and now we're making what adults make. *(Laughter.)* Yes, amazingly, we've turned into adults, just because time has passed.

DAK: *What will you do after this?*

ED: I have no idea, I really don't know.

DAK: *You're not going back to GREEN ARROW?*

ED: I don't think so. I might go back for one issue. I think I want to do some *other* stuff, like things without deadlines, because what I really would like to do is rest and just enjoy my life a little bit, as much as I can afford to. But I don't want to retire or anything like that, I want to keep working. So, I'd like to get some work that doesn't have deadlines. What it's going to be, I don't know yet. And then I have a project I want to work on which will be mine, which I'll write and draw and probably ink — do *everything* on. Like everybody wants to do, I want to do it, too. *(Laughter.)* And then that will either succeed or fail, and depending on whether it succeeds or fails I will determine what I want to do after that.

DAK: *That's usually the big move that people make to become majors.*

ED: Yeah. I can't do it just yet, but I want to do it soon.

"I've done mini-series and graphic novels here and there."

"My first big break was through Larry Hama at Marvel."

CHUCK DIXON

We last talked to Chuck Dixon back in COMICS INTERVIEW #57 when he was just beginning to make a name for himself in comics as a scripter.

Now he's no longer an unknown quantity — the smash ROBIN miniseries has landed him front and center in mainstream superhero comics. Let's share the insights experience and success have brought him . . .

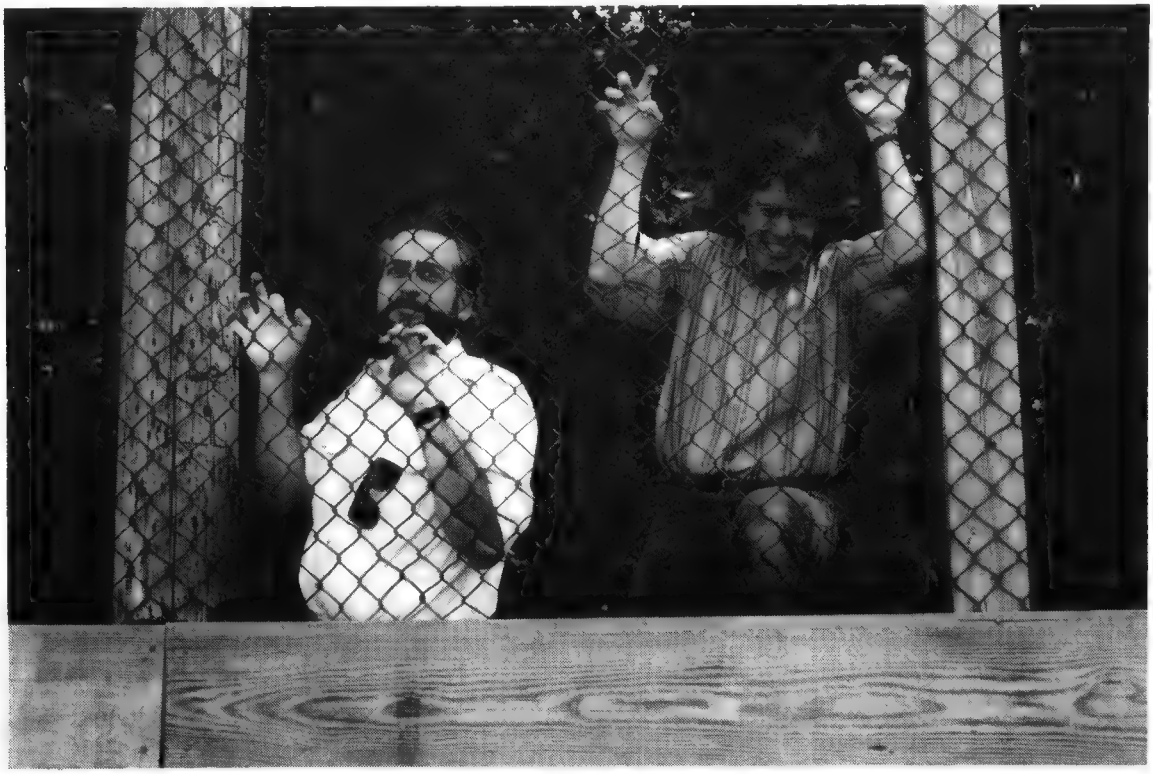
RENE WITTERSTAETTER: *What did you first write?*

CHUCK DIXON: I broke in with Comico doing EVANGELINE during the explosion of the independent companies.

RENE: *What kind of company was Comico to work for?*

CHUCK: At the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm. As it became more and more of a business I found out that they were better off with enthusiasm. *(Laughter.)* I think the business outgrew them. I left very early, before a lot of their big successes like ELEMENTALS. Then my first *big* break was through **Larry Hama** at Marvel. He let me write some SAVAGE TALES stories, I wrote the Kull back-up in SAVAGE SWORD, and then eventually he gave me the lead feature and, as you know, I did the lead feature for four years under various

Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle totally enmeshed in their work.



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"Once I proved reliability, editors noticed. I've worked

editors. And once I proved my reliability there, and at Eclipse with AIRBOY, other editors started noticing me. That was it.

RENE: *Have you worked at most of the major companies?*

CHUCK: I've worked for almost everybody but Dark Horse and Disney, so far.

RENE: *What are the differences between the demands that each company places on the writer?*

CHUCK: It's a difference between editors — there's no company policy, I've found. Every editor is different. Whether it's a tiny little company with three titles or monoliths like Marvel or DC, there's really no difference, it's still a really personal business. It's your relationship with your editor and your penciller, that's what it gets down to.

RENE: *It's kind of precarious, then, because if a book changes editors you might find yourself not on that book anymore?*

CHUCK: Either that or in a whole new set of circumstances. A lot of things go on the readers aren't aware of. Editorial changes . . . some books you feel that it came out the way you wanted it to, some books you don't, because it gets into the production machine. But that's just something to deal with, it keeps it interesting. I think I've had a good relationship with everyone I've ever worked with, even if we didn't agree — and sometimes some of the best books come out of not agreeing. *(Laughter.)* It creates a tension between all of the creative people; it's not a *bad* tension, it's a *good* tension, to make you do your best. "He thinks I can't write, I'm gonna *show* him!" But that's what it gets down to, it's not a company thing. I don't notice a difference.

RENE: *Can you think of any situations where something was changed that you really did* not *agree with?*

CHUCK: Uh . . . I wouldn't agree with *some* of the changes but I can see why they made them. There was a story with the Punisher and Moon Knight in which the Punisher drops a guy into a car compactor. Moon Knight is interrogating him and Punisher decides he's not doing a good enough job so the Punisher begins interrogating him, and the guy tells what he knows, the information they need, and then the Punisher turns the car compactor on and squashes him. He was in a convertible, so he becomes mangled with this Caddy, and *my* line was that Moon Knight would say, "Do you know what you've done?" and the Punisher says, "Yeah, that Caddy was a cream puff." I thought that just showed the Punisher's callousness. But they changed it. I don't agree with it, but I see why they did it.

RENE: *You and Tim Truman have worked on quite a few projects together, haven't you?*

CHUCK: Yeah, we co-created, or co-*re*-created, AIRBOY, then we formed 4Winds to package books for Eclipse Comics — things like STRIKE or PROWLER — and then we actually turned the packaging company into a publishing company.

RENE: *What kind of things do you publish?*

CHUCK: Graphic novels. We had gotten a connection for European art through Argentina, and we were bringing up a lot of Argentine art that had been done for Italy and France. I guess at this point we've published seven books. We did two volumes of ATTU with **Sam Glanzman,** and Tim has done WILDERNESS, a two-part graphic novel about **Simon Girty,** a renegade from Revolutionary War America. The WILDERNESS books are by far our most successful. Tim has put a lot of heart into them, two years of research, and they're still perennial sellers for us, we've gone back to press a few times.

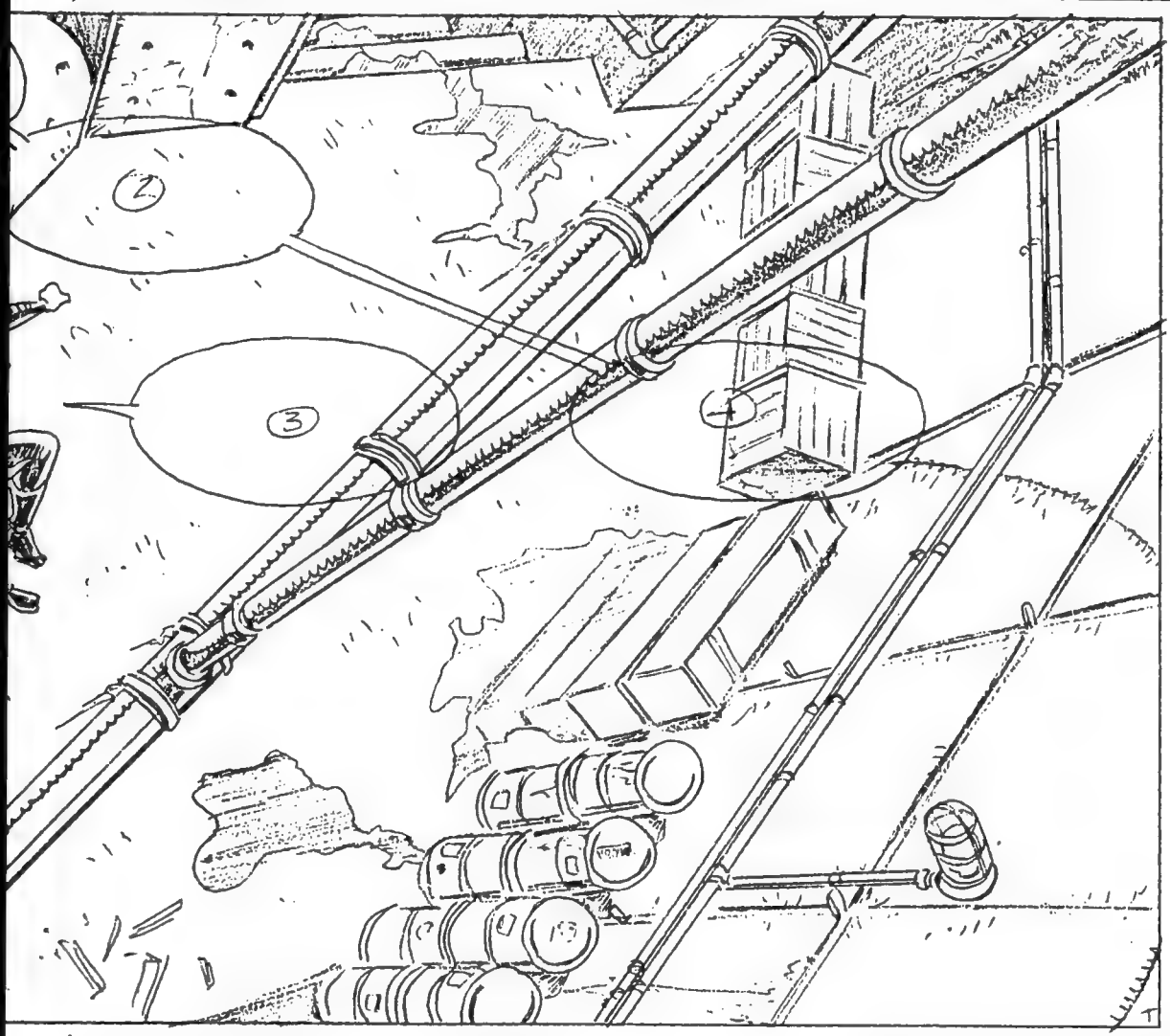
RENE: *Do you act as editor on these books?*

CHUCK: Nothing with 4Winds is *that* concrete, it's just the two of us. If you get a package from 4Winds it was lovingly packed by one or the other of us. *(Laughter.)* We do whatever has to be done at the time.

RENE: *You two must be pretty good friends to work on that close of a basis.*

CHUCK: Yeah, yeah. It's been a strain on our friendship, being in business, but I

for almost everybody but Dark Horse and Disney."



think we can bear up under it.

RENE: *How long have you known Tim?*

CHUCK: Oh, geez, Tim wrote a letter to EVANGELINE when I first started doing it, so . . . man, I can't believe this, it's got to be six or seven years.

RENE: *Was he in comics at that time?*

CHUCK: Yes, he had just done GRIMJACK — GRIMJACK #1 had come out — and Grimjack was in the same pose that Evangeline was in her first issue — they came out exactly the same month.

RENE: *Wow.*

CHUCK: So there was obviously a connection there. *(Laughter.)*

RENE: *Some kind of psychic connection.*

CHUCK: Yeah. He wrote a letter, I wrote a letter back, and then we met at a Chicago convention and realized that we were sympatico on a lot of things.

RENE: *Are there some things that you want to publish that you haven't been able to do yet?*

CHUCK: Not really, we're kind of slowing down on that end.

RENE: *Because of the economy?*

CHUCK: The economy, and graphic novels . . . I don't think anybody sells that many graphic novels, and if you're a small company it's even worse. You don't want to move into the monthlies because it's too much of a hassle — both of us have very busy freelance careers. I think we're going to concentrate more on Tim's end of the thing with WILDERNESS since we got a big response from *outside* the comics industry. We sold quite a few copies through WILD WEST MAGAZINE, MUZZLE LOADER; they sell at mountain man rendezvous rather than at comics conventions. And we've gotten quite a bit of press on it. That's more where the company will lean, sort of slow down the schedule and concentrate on that, and just bring out projects as they're completed, not try to keep a printing schedule up. Both of us are busy.

RENE: *That must have been quite an adjustment, going from the creative side of comics into the actual publishing side.*

CHUCK: It's been an education. It's helped me a lot in my freelance career, especially knowing the distribution end, *why* distributors buy comics, why retailers *order* so many of this. It's helped me out an awful lot.

RENE: *Made you realize what's saleable?*

CHUCK: Yeah, what's saleable, what's commercial, what are they looking for; the realities of the business. What you've got to do to call attention to something that may not be commercial. Because I've done everything but be an actual editor, it's allowed me to see everything from either side. It's helped.

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"The biggest thing I've worked on so far was ROBIN."

RENE: *We've mentioned a few of your freelance credits. Could you tell me what else you've written, and what you're currently writing?*

CHUCK: I did the first two years of MOON KNIGHT, the new MOON KNIGHT. I've done ALIEN LEGION for Epic, I've been doing that for three or four years. I've done quite a few things for Eclipse, WINTERWORLD, STRIKE. For Now Comics I did ALIAS and RACER X. I've done a lot of mini-series and graphic novels here and there; I've done a KA-ZAR graphic novel, a PUNISHER graphic novel, and I've got a WARMAN graphic novel coming out from Epic, a new character. I'm the regular writer on THE 'NAM now. I've done a few fill-ins with PUNISHER. I'm doing CAR WARRIORS for Epic, based on the CAR WARS role-playing game. And I guess the biggest thing I've worked on so far is ROBIN.

RENE: *What kind of experience was that? How was it different from other things that you've written?*

CHUCK: Well, it was what they called at DC "editorially driven," which *could* have made it a nightmare. So many people at the company wanted to say what the series would be about, where it would begin and where it would end, what they expected from it.

RENE: *They wanted to know everything?*

CHUCK: They wanted to know everything and they had a lot of ideas to give me. Basically, we knew where it was going to begin, they *told* me where it would begin, and they told me where it had to end.

RENE: *Could you do anything in between?*

"Batman and Robin, there's a reason why they've been

CHUCK: Oh, sure. *(Laughter.)* But at the beginning I didn't think so, I thought I'd really walked into a meat grinder and they were going to just tear everything I wrote apart. But they were very good about it, very encouraging. **Denny O'Neil** put everything in place for me.

RENE: *Had you worked with Denny before?*

CHUCK: No, never. But in a very short time — he knows so *much* about Batman, he's got such a *handle* on the character like I don't think anybody else does — he was able to give me the rundown on the Batman and Robin relationship, and the relationship with Alfred, and what all that meant. So the first issue was pretty scary, but everything went great, I had a good time on it. They let me do what I wanted to most of the time, I was very surprised. Because it's not only Denny looking at it, it's everybody else.

RENE: *Because of the success of the DEATH IN THE FAMILY project?*

CHUCK: DEATH IN THE FAMILY, and it's all related to the next movie — which I don't know anything about so don't ask me. *(Laughter.)* But all these things came into play, and I'm thinking, "My God, I'm going to have everybody in the world examining this with a microscope." But they *liked* it if they did, so everything went very well, it was a very pleasant experience. And the thing about Batman and Robin, there's a reason why they've been around 50 years.

RENE: *What's that?*

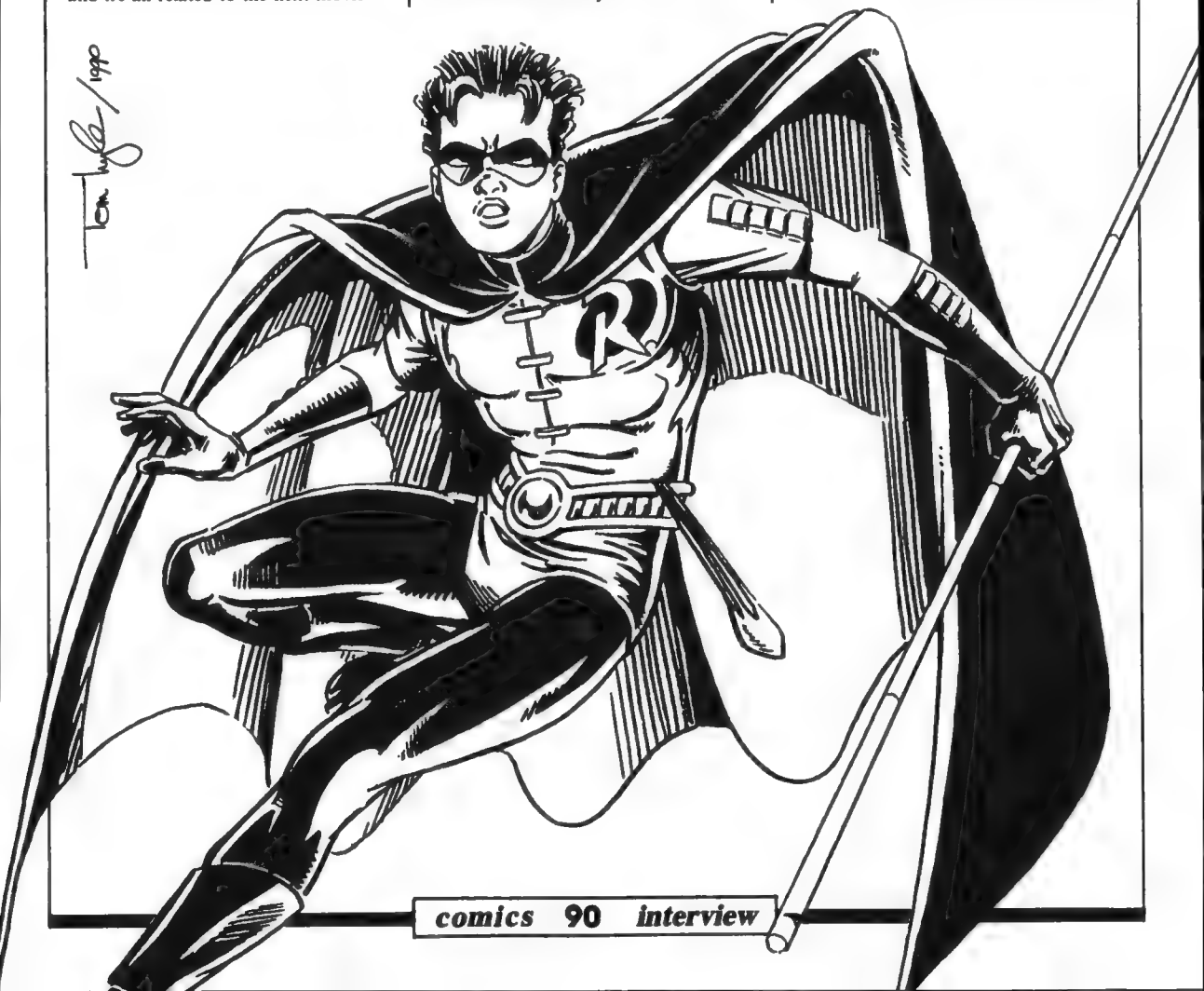
CHUCK: I don't know what it is. *(Laughter.)* But they're *classic,* they're classic characters. There's something about them that readers have responded to. Batman is not all hype either, you can't keep a character going 50 years on hype. There's something appealing about him and Robin, and that made the job that much easier. It's just classic material.

RENE: *For those that may not know, could you set up the premise for the series for us?*

CHUCK: The premise is that Tim Drake, in about 18 months running storyline, Tim Drake has discovered Batman is Bruce Wayne and because of that, obviously, he's got some kind of handle on Batman, and he wants to be the next Robin. He auditions for the job over and over again and *finally* Batman offers him the costume, and that's where our mini-series begins. Tim Drake says he's not ready for the job, doesn't have whatever it is. "I'm a fair detective, I'm a decent athlete, but I *can't* let you down. I'd rather walk away than let you down." So what Batman suggests is he go out in the world and find whatever it takes to become Robin. And after that it's a series of calamities with Tim Drake. He goes to learn under a martial arts master but that never really works out, and then he's drawn into this globe-trotting adventure, and in the course of this adventure he learns what he has to learn from many masters, including the villain. He's exposed to a lot of things that he's never been exposed to, and by the end of it he's ready to take on the mantle of Robin.

RENE: *How would you describe his character? What kind of teenager is he?*

CHUCK: He's not real secure in social situations. Basically he's a real *doof*



around 50 years. I don't know what it is. *(Laughter.)*"

around girls, which I wanted to make clear because all the Robins before have been so —

RENE: *Debonair?*

CHUCK: Yeah, well. *(Laughter.)* These teenage Romeos. We were *never* Romeos, nobody's a Romeo when he's a teenager. And Tim is very good with computers but he's also an athlete, which to me is a dichotomy in a character, he's a jock and a nerd all at the same time and the two things war within him. He's not very intuitive about people. Batman by being Batman is very distrustful and suspicious, and Robin is not naive but he just doesn't know how to read people. By the end of the series he gets a little more adept at that.

RENE: *How else does he change by the end of the series?*

CHUCK: Well, he's tougher by the end. He's also presented with a lot of choices, choices that if he decides this way he can't be Robin, if he decides that way he can be. Deadly force is one of the choices he has to make. He's left in a situation where it really is, you know, a very difficult decision for him to make. And he's also presented, once again, with the death of someone close to him. So, a lot of changes by the end of the series. He's more comfortable with Robin, he's more comfortable in a street fight situation. It's like boxers say, it's not how hard you can hit, it's how hard you can get hit. By the end of the series he can get hit really hard and still come back.

RENE: *Let's see, you worked with Tom Lyle and Bob Smith on this?*

CHUCK: Yes.

RENE: *What did you think of the art team and the total package?*

CHUCK: I felt it was really beautiful. I'd worked with Tom before on STRIKE and SKYWOLF at Eclipse, so we were really comfortable working with each other. And I thought **Bob Smith** just . . . he did something with Tom's art, he opened it up. It was a good marriage between the two. They had worked together before, but I felt this was by far the *best* thing they'd ever done together. It was a great collaboration. I was real pleased with it.

RENE: *Was this the first time you'd worked at DC?*

CHUCK: Very first time, I hit a home run the first time at bat at DC.

RENE: *That's a really nice project to work on.*

CHUCK: Yeah, yeah. You usually break in on some title facing cancellation or something.

RENE: *How did you get the job?*

CHUCK: I'm still not real sure. *(Laughter.)* Tom was working for DC exclusively and they offered him the ROBIN mini-series and they asked him if he knew a writer interested, and he just brought my name up. Denny and **Dan Raspler,** the other editor of the series, apparently had been thinking about approaching me anyway about doing some work for them, so one day I didn't have it and the next day I did. It really was a "slap me, I'm dreaming" situation.

RENE: *Things happen real fast in this business.*

CHUCK: Yeah, it's feast or famine.

RENE: *Do you foresee doing more work for DC?*

CHUCK: They've offered me a BRONZE TIGER mini-series. Bronze Tiger is a character from SUICIDE SQUAD, a martial arts expert, and I don't know much about him. They've offered it and I've submitted a really *sketchy* plotline, I have to hear back.

RENE: *Would Denny be editing that?*

CHUCK: No, **Dan Raspler** would be editing that. Denny has *talked* to me about doing a three-issue BATMAN arc. Arc's a word I just learned the other day, I would have called it a mini-series within a series.

RENE: *Yeah, I've heard that recently too, the story arc.*

CHUCK: I felt kind of dumb because I said, "Gee, I wish they'd come up with a word for "mini-series within a series," and he said, "It's called an arc." *(Laughter.)* I didn't get that newsletter, I don't know, but it's a good word — it's a *short* one anyway. *(Laughter.)* And then there is talk of another ROBIN mini-series next year, maybe they'll keep the whole team together.

RENE: *That would be nice to see. So, your plans are to keep on writing as much as you are now or more?*

CHUCK: Less. *(Laughter.)* I can't keep up this schedule. Also, people keep talking about me as the most prolific guy in comics, which means it's like they're saying, "How does he hack it out so quick?" I don't want to get that kind of rep, so I'm going to —

RENE: *Do less and be more appreciated.*

CHUCK: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* I'll probably still have the same high profile because I do jump from company to company and do short-term projects, but at least I'll know I'm writing less. I might take a vacation for the first time in five years.

"I've never been real thrilled with the Robins."

TOM LYLE

Recently I had the pleasure of being a guest at the Augusta-Con 4 at the Book Exchange in Southgate Plaza. Tom Lyle (artist of the very hot ROBIN mini-series) and I have known each other for about nine years and we had a great time at the convention, where this COMICS INTERVIEW confab took place. Meet the fun side of Tom Lyle . . .

ROGER BROWN: *How did you end up with the ROBIN assignment?*

TOM LYLE: I was doing a book called STARMAN and, at that time, I had worked out a deal with DC to do another book, so I set #25 to be my last issue of STARMAN. As I looked ahead I thought there might be a big gap in my schedule, so I called up the BATMAN editor, **Denny O'Neill,** who had expressed interest in using me on something in the future. Editors do have a policy of not raiding talent from other editors within their own company, so people would have frowned if he had asked for me while I was still working on STARMAN. I asked Denny if he had a fill-in issue of BATMAN that I could do. He asked if I would be interested in working on a mini-series. When I learned that the mini-series was ROBIN I said, "Wow, twist my arm and I'll do it." Robin is part of the Batman mythos, although I've never been real thrilled with the Robins in the book. Dick Grayson, the original Robin, I couldn't have given a flip about when I was a kid; it was like, "Get out of the way, kid, I want to see Batman." The second Robin, Jason Todd, I don't know enough about him because I wasn't a regular reader at the time. From what I did read, I didn't think he was a very likeable character . . .

ROGER: *You voted to have him killed?*

TOM: *(Laughter.)* I did not vote to have him killed! What was really neat about getting the ROBIN assignment was that I was able to return a favor to **Chuck**

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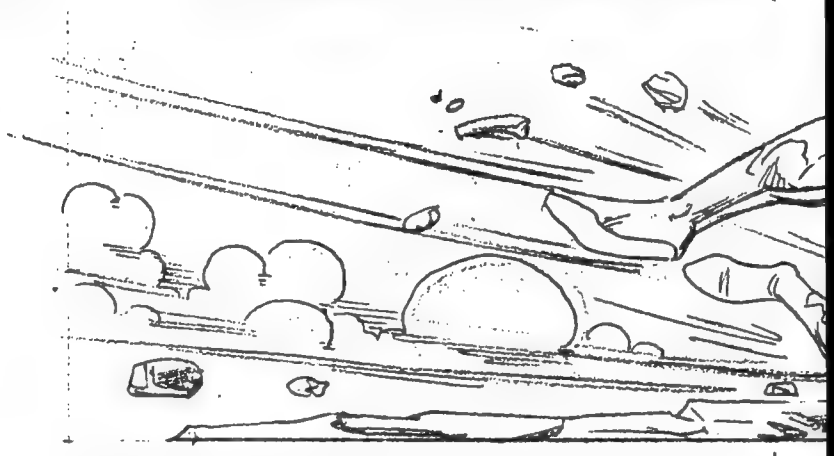
"ROBIN #1 sold 600,000, three times what they expected."

Top: Oblong pencil panel from Lyle's last STARMAN job from DC Comics. Tom considers the work on this issue to be far superior to his earlier work on this title. Below: Another oblong panel, this one from the ROBIN mini-series, written by Chuck Dixon.



Dixon, who offered me the SKYWOLF assignment when I was first getting started. Basically, they wanted a writer for the series who had some sort of background in martial arts — or at least knew about martial arts. They wanted ROBIN to have a very heavy martial arts edge to it. I suggested that **Chuck Dixon** might be available and all of a sudden both of us had a new job and that was kind of neat. As a penciller I can't do too many jobs, I can usually only do one book a month. As a writer, **Chuck Dixon** writes about four or five books a month.

ROGER: *Are you happy with the way the series has worked out so far?*

TOM: As a matter of fact, yes, I'm real thrilled with the overall project. I think it is the best work that Chuck has done and the best work that I have done as far as pencilling. **Bob Smith,** who inked over me on the early issues of STARMAN, is even better now. And part of that is that my art is better also. I have also finished drawing all five issues so they will all ship on time. DC is satisfied because they were expecting really good things out of this and it has really grown into something larger than they expected.

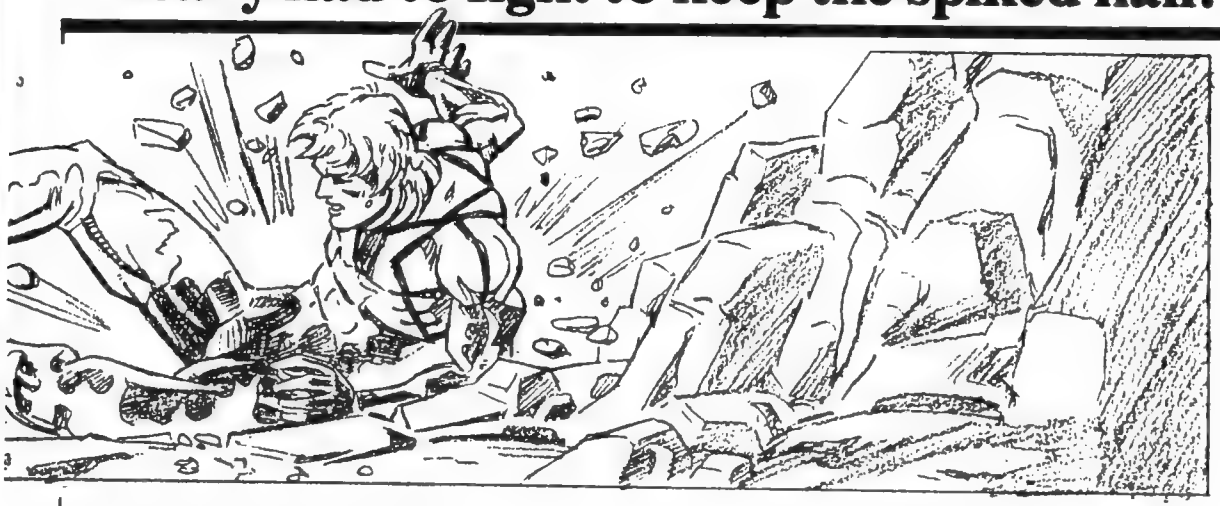
ROGER: *How are you handling the success, the notoriety gained from the series?*

TOM: ROBIN #1 has sold, or will sell, in the neighborhood of 600,000 copies and the good average comic book would sell around 100,000 copies. DC was projecting sales of around 200,000 copies so the sales are at least three times what they were expecting, maybe more. Because of the huge sales figures **Chuck Dixon** and I are getting quite a bit of attention as writer and artist on the series. Luckily, I don't think I have the personality to want to be a prima donna star type. Basically, my wife said if I start to sound too egotistical she will kick my butt. *(Laughter.)* On a more serious note she has been one of the more objective people to look at what has been going on with me and helped me by offering advice.

ROGER: *How did DC come up with the new Robin costume?*

TOM: There was actually, at one point, going to be a costume design contest in which people would get to vote on their favorite costume. There were 12 to 15 costume designs laid out, which the one out now is one of. Before they did the costume contest they showed the designs to the director of the first BATMAN movie, **Tim Burton,** because Warner Brothers does have some say in the look of the new Robin because not only are they the parent company of DC but they also did the first BATMAN movie, which made lots of bucks. **Tim Burton** wants to use the new Robin in the new movie. Robin should be in the second movie but don't quote me on that. **Tim Burton,** after looking over the designs, said he didn't want a contest and decided on the costume he wanted. The new cos-

"I really had to fight to keep the spiked hair."



tume was designed by **Neal Adams.** The costume is exciting because while it is new it uses the old elements at the same time.

ROGER: *Why is your Robin's hair different from Neal Adams' version?*

TOM: I really had to fight to keep the spiked hair, not that helmet-head look. I wanted it to be really different, he's only 13. That's just my interpretation of how it should be.

ROGER: *Most of the comments at conventions revolve around the fact that they're glad to see that Robin isn't wearing shorts anymore.*

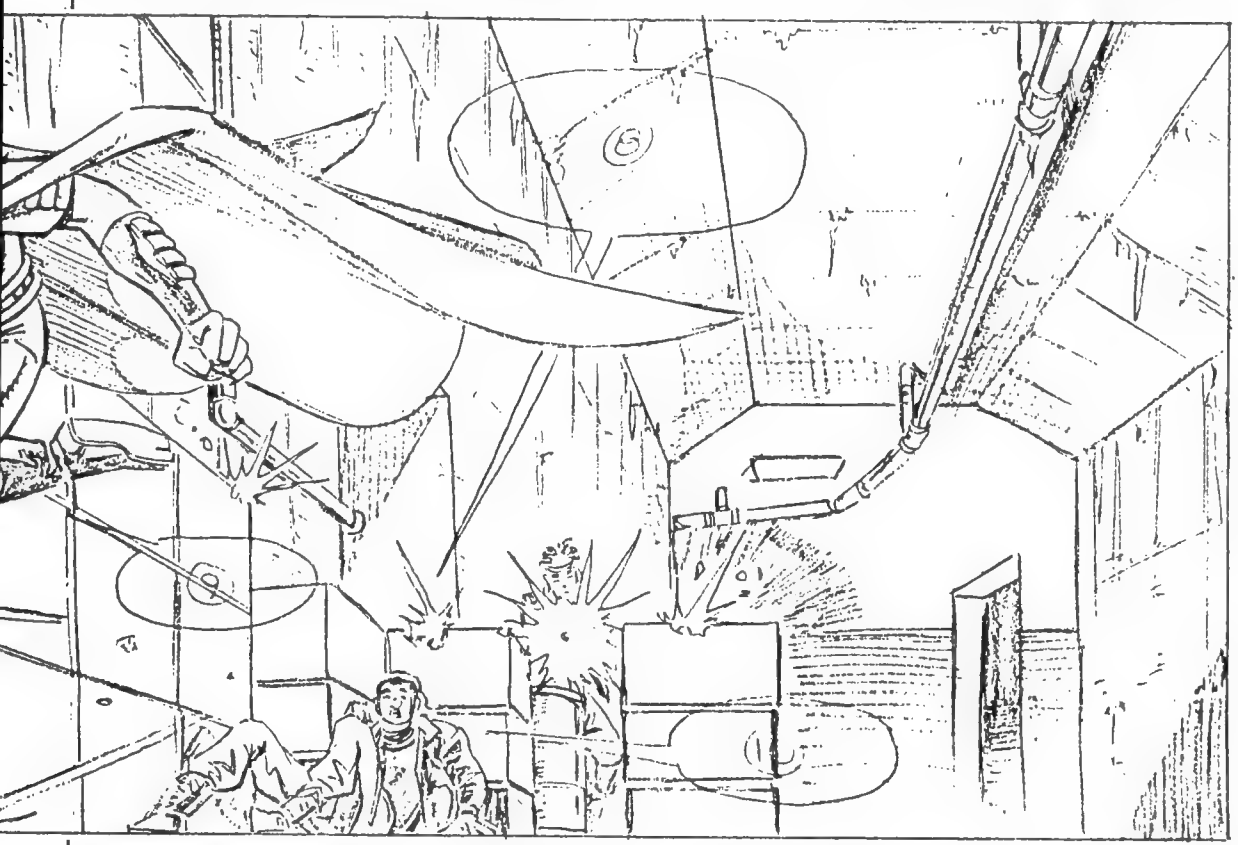
TOM: He now wears tights, and he doesn't have the pixie-type boots anymore, he has a ninja-type of boot these days. Our intention with the mini-series was to make Robin a viable, likeable character so they won't have another situation where readers will want to call in and have him killed. This Robin is also designed to be a little more intense in the sense that he will be right there, at Batman's side.

ROGER: *Is there another Robin waiting in the wings?*

TOM: No. They're thrilled this one's working out. Personally I like this Robin better than the other two and hope that he'll be around a long time.

ROGER: *So they're not going to kill him off again?*

TOM: I really don't think so. They've already announced another mini-series planned for November of this year —



"The costume is similar. Merchandising shouldn't be hurt."

More STARMAN pencils, from issue 25, Tom's last issue on the series.

I guess I can say that, **Denny O'Neill** has already been talking about it — so I think he'll be around awhile. The same creative team will do the next series as well.

ROGER: *Will merchandising force the return of the original Robin, like in the BATMAN syndicated strip?*

TOM: I doubt it. The new costume is so similar, the merchandising shouldn't be hurt by it. It's a nice extrapolation of the original. I think that was part of the reason this costume was selected over the others. You can still easily recognize him as Robin.

ROGER: *Why did they name him Tim Drake, which is a duck?*

TOM: *(Laughter.)* I don't know.

"Around '66 I discovered Marvel Comics."

Marv Wolfman and **Alan Grant** came up with it.

ROGER: *How did you first get involved in comics?*

TOM: I've always wanted to do comics ever since I was a kid. When I was college age, my parents encouraged me to go into advertising so I majored in Advertising Design at the University of Florida. I did advertising art for ten years which I found extremely boring.

ROGER: *You designed Campbell soup can labels?*

TOM: No, nothing that interesting. *(Laughter.)* I designed logos for temporary job shots, that sort of thing. Somewhere along the line during my advertising career I started sending out resumes and I ended up as art director for a print shop in Augusta.

ROGER: *Who were some of the early influences on your work?*

TOM: I read a lot of the DC stuff, BATMAN, SUPERMAN, because they were handed down to me. I was the youngest of three boys in the family.

ROGER: *These comics were well read?*

TOM: These comics weren't in mint condition when they were handed down to me and certainly not so when I was through with them; they *were* well read. Collecting was a pretty new thing and not really around then. I'm talking about the mid-Sixties. Some of the DC artists like **Carmine Infantino** and **Gil Kane** were influences. Around 1966 I discovered the wonderful world of Marvel Comics. Back then quite a few artists had a lasting impact on the comics industry and me in particular; **Jack Kirby,** who created characters like Fantastic Four and Captain America, **Steve Ditko,** who helped create Spider-Man. His style was wildly different from **Kirby** and I felt like a kid in a toy shop. Towards the early '70s, when I first started to do comic art seriously, I discovered **Barry Smith,** who

The Comet, as illustrated by Tom.

"I knew I could draw, even when one particular editor

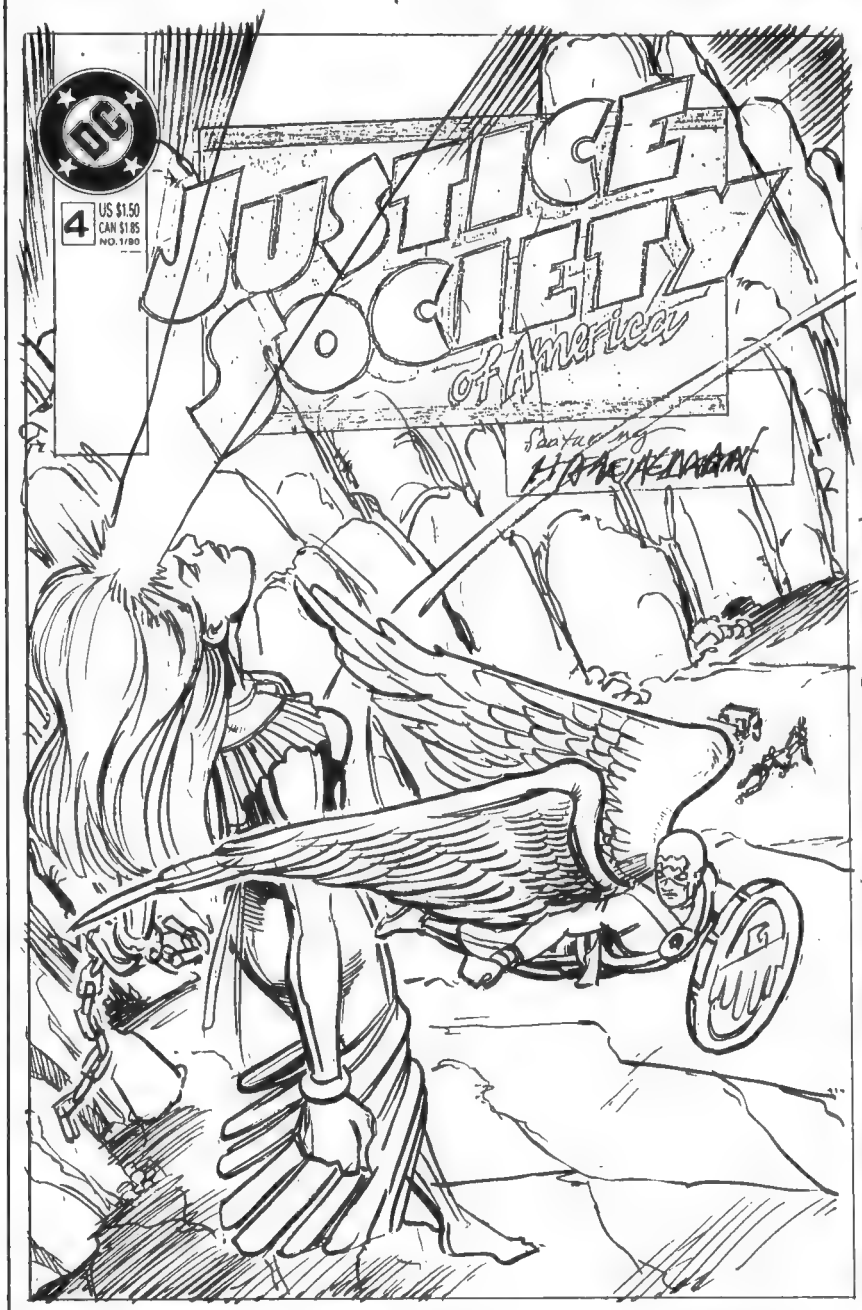
was drawing CONAN THE BARBARIAN. When I was trying to develop a style I tried to draw exactly like him.

ROGER: *How difficult is laying out the panel design?*

TOM: Panel layout is where I look at myself as a director and I like to think about it as setting up the shots, varying the angles and shots, close ups, long shots — that's part of the fun. To me it's sort of hard, sort of not hard. It's enjoyably hard.

ROGER: *How did you go about breaking into the comics industry?*

TOM: I knew I had to be closer to New York City — since both Marvel and DC are located in New York — so my wife and I moved to Baltimore, MD. It isn't that close but it is an easy three-hour train ride to NYC and it is cheaper than living in NYC. The intent was that I would go into the city regularly and show my stuff. I was showing my stuff for a year and a half and of all things I ended up working for a company in California called Eclipse Comics. I ran into **Chuck Dixon** back in 1986 at a comic book convention in Philadelphia and at the tme he was writing a book called AIRBOY, which was the revival of a character from the '40s. They were doing a back-up series using a former Airboy character called SKY WOLVES and they needed an artist. **Chuck Dixon** offered me that back-up strip based on what he saw at the convention. I was already doing some work in comics for some smaller companies but that was the event that triggered my career. I've been working



Three phases of a Tom Lyle cover creation, all in their breakdown stages . . .

told me I should quit. I stuck to my guns and kept with it."

regularly since then, since July of 1986. Getting into the industry was a matter of doing samples, showing them to people at conventions and going to New York to show my work. I knew I could draw even when one particular editor told me I should quit drawing. Basically, I stuck to my own personal guns and kept with it. Persistence in this industry does pay off because there are so many people that want to be in comics.

ROGER: *What advice would you give for someone wanting to get into comics today?*

TOM: That's a tough question because there are various ways to get in. Some of the editors at big comics companies may hate me for this but I will say that the people that are really serious and want to break into the industry should pick a particular editor at the company that you are interested in and gear your submissions towards him. If, say, you like GREEN LANTERN at DC, the editor is **Andy Helfer.** I would either do your writing or your art samples based on that character and send it directly to that editor rather than the submissions editor. Go to conventions, show your art around. Before you send your work to an editor you should show your art or writing to another artist or writer and get an opinion, because you have to be objective about your work.

ROGER: *You have to be critical of your work?*

TOM: Right now DC is saying that my art is really great, I'm improving all the time — but I know that there are

. . . The one in the center was the one picked, which was an "adjusted" version of the third breakdown.

"The Jaguar, The Shield, The Fly — I will be doing the

weaknesses in my art. I know what they are and I hope that each issue my work constantly gets better. Luckily, so far, I have been able to say that each issue of a book that I have done *does* get better. The fifth issue of ROBIN is drawn much better than the first issue; the 25th issue of STARMAN is drawn better than the first issue.

ROGER: *You become more comfortable with a character the longer you are on a title?*

TOM: That and the fact that I am becoming a much better artist. Robin for example, by the end of the fifth issue I was saying, "Yeah, I love this costume, let me draw more." The costume is really a fun one to draw and Robin is a fun character to draw. Persistence of sending material, showing material, and taking advice of others is important. You need to really draw or write a lot, you can't take one sample and show it over the course of a year.

ROGER: *One has to learn to deal with the rejection when first starting out.*

TOM: You have to be willing to face it because there is going to be quite a bit, you're going to hear quite a few no's before the doors start to open. Once you're in the door, unless you're dumb and screw yourself up by not being reliable and meeting the deadline, you can stay in the industry. I've built a reputation by being reliable. And by trying to improve. The editors know that

revival of The Comet. This will be a new line for DC."

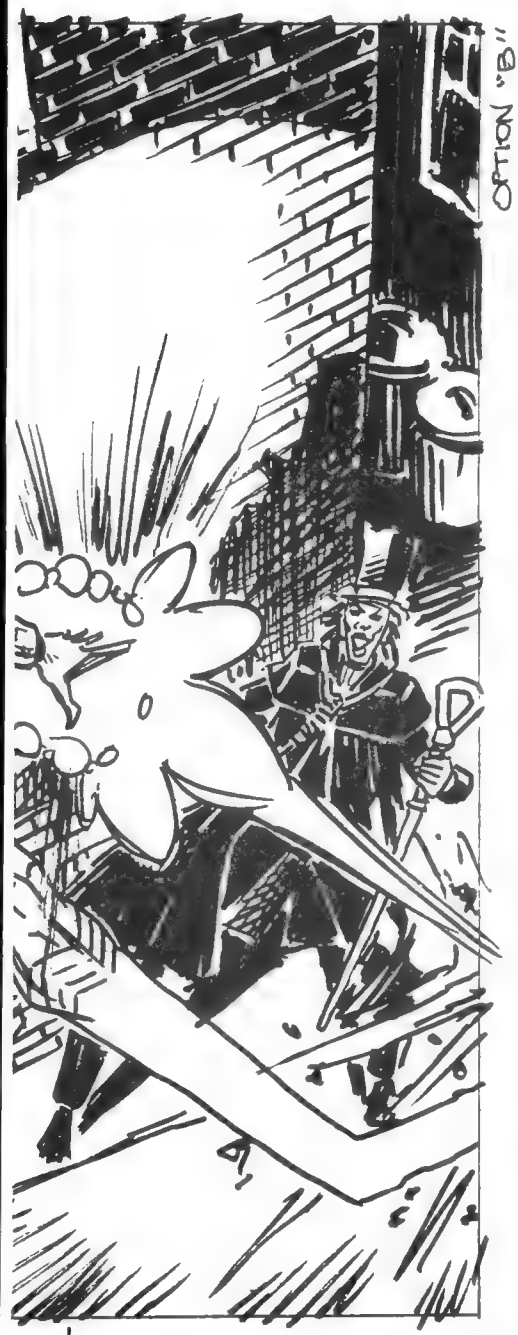
I am striving to do better and better. It's important to remember that comics are a business.

ROGER: *You mentioned that you have finished up the artwork for the ROBIN mini-series. What future projects do you have planned?*

TOM: I will be working on a superhero from the '40s and '50s named The Comet. I will be doing the revival of The Comet. The Comet will be the first book that I will be plotting and doing rough dialogue. I will be pencilling and inking the book. I worked up a bible for the revival of this character which gives the origin, the person's personality, plot line, location, that sort of thing. I've plotted into the second year of the series. I've also designed all of the characters, along with five or six major villains.

ROGER: *You mentioned the possibility of a crossover between your book and some others.*

TOM: Crossovers will only be with characters within this line of comics, The Jaguar, Shield, The Fly. The crossovers will be major events when they happen, we don't want them to be gratuitous crossovers. The books will launch in late May or early June and we will try to release a book every week or every two weeks. Since this will be a new line of books for DC they will be promoting the line and will want to have the books out in time for the major conventions this summer.



As with the previous two pages . . . a three-version evolution of a DC cover, here for the second issue of THE COMET.

COVER ROUGHS - COMET #2

THIS ONE WAS USED

EITH BRIAN AUGUSTYN AND I LIKE OPTION A, BUT THIS BOOK SHOULD HAVE AN ACTION CHARACTER) SO "C" WAS PICKED

"Dredd has Batman in custody, where he intends to keep

ALAN GRANT

In COMICS INTERVIEW #99, Alan Grant discussed his work as a scripter of DC's LOBO series. Now, here in #101, he talks about another of his forthcoming collaborations with artist Simon Bisley, JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM, the graphic novel in which Batman encounters perhaps Britain's most famous comic-book character, Judge Dredd. Grant is the current writer of DC's BATMAN, and he and his frequent partner John Wagner have been the principal writers on JUDGE DREDD for many years. Wagner is co-writing the Batman-Dredd book with Grant.

Those of you who read COMICS INTERVIEW #99 will recall that my interviews with Grant and Bisley had to be redone due to a malfunctioning tape recorder; hence, the several references throughout the interview below to "what we were saying yesterday."

PETER SANDERSON: *You were saying yesterday that the Batman-Judge Dredd team-up was first suggested to you and John Wagner a number of years ago, and that Wagner turned it down because he didn't like superheroes. You also said that, at the time, DC intended the team-up as an attempt to boost Batman's popularity.*

ALAN GRANT: That's the way I heard it, anyway. I was told Batman's popularity was at such a low point that they wanted any publicity at all, they wanted any gimmick to boost sales. **Alan Moore** and **Brian Bolland** were then, to the best of my knowledge, selected to do it. Nobody mentioned the project again to **John Wagner** or me after that. I met **Alan Moore** personally and passed along to him the fact that we weren't very happy at the thought of him doing Judge Dredd — particularly when the writers perceive characters that they've created being used by the publisher, not so much without their consent but without any consultation whatsoever. Anyway, so far as I know, because of that I believe what he and Brian ended up with instead was THE KILLING JOKE — which from their point of view can't have been a bad thing, because it's still in print and sold a lot of copies over the years.

PETER: *Next Dredd-Batman was offered to Alan Davis?*

ALAN: It was offered to **Alan Davis** with **Paul Neary** as his inker. He did draw a Judge Dredd story which featured a Batman-like character, which was written especially for him, to give him a sort of taste for the actual team-up book — and he did a really good job of it for 2000 AD. But I believe he wasn't able to obtain as advantageous a percentage for himself and Paul on the team-up as he would have got from his dealings with Marvel. So the way I understand that is he went off to do EXCALIBUR, instead. Again, you can't say that was a bad move.

PETER: *And then it was again offered to you and John Wagner after the BATMAN movie came out?*

ALAN: That's right. John and I came up with this idea for it which involved a monstrous creature, which wasn't too much to DC's or Fleetway's liking. And we also tried to play it more straightforward, with Judge Dredd as the blind, obedient servant of the law and Batman as the caring vigilante — the antithesis, really, of Judge Dredd. And we found that these stories sucked, actually, not to put too fine a point on it. It came out flat and boring.

PETER: *It was overly serious?*

ALAN: It was. We played up the horror angle too much. We played up the humor angle far too little. We had spent considerable time on this, and didn't want to junk it, so we said, "Okay, let's go with it." We sent copies of the proposal off to Fleetway and to **Denny O'Neil** at DC. Both parties passed it and told us to get started. It was on the night that we actually started to write it; we sat down and looked at each other — we never really liked this one. Let's see if we can come up with something that makes us happy while we're writing it, that gives us a laugh, that entertains us.

We toyed around with a few villains. We ended up with Judge Death, who's Judge Dredd's personal nemesis; Mean Machine Angel, who's had a steel plate surgically implanted in his head with a dial on it which, when it reads two, he's downright nasty, and when it reads four, he goes into a head-to-head frenzy. His preferred method of combat is the head butt. On the Gotham side we threw in the Scarecrow.

Also from Mega-City One we threw in Judge Anderson, who's a female psi-judge, because she's a much better partner for Batman than Judge Dredd. Judge Dredd is too much of an old

Batman/Judge Dredd: JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM ©1991 DC Comics Inc. and Fleetway Publications Ltd. All rights reserved.

him for the next 20 years on various vigilante charges."

stickler. I don't know if the word "stickler" means anything much in America. Do you know what the word "curmudgeon" means?

PETER: *Yes.*

ALAN: Yeah, well, that's kind of what Judge Dredd's like. He's a bit of an old curmudgeon.

PETER: *Also rather asexual.*

ALAN: Yeah, and we got some sparks going between Anderson and Batman. They were quite impressed with each other.

PETER: *That's interesting, since it's been said that women don't have much of a role to play in Batman's life.*

ALAN: It's not been proposed or anything, but even if we did a follow-up, I'm not sure how far along we would follow the spark between them, because — and I think **Denny O'Neil** would agree with this — it's been pretty well stated that Ra's Al Ghul's daughter Talia is the only girl with whom Batman could fall in love. Although there's obviously sparks between Batman and Catwoman, it's always really been Talia who's been sort of the lost potential love of his life, and I wouldn't want to go against that. I'm quite happy without getting any sort of romantic involvement between Batman and Judge Anderson. Anderson's a real flirty kind of person.

PETER: *This provides another interesting contrast between Dredd and Batman. It humanizes Batman because he's able to get along with her better.*

ALAN: Yeah, exactly. Anderson actually helps Batman. Dredd has Batman in custody, where he intends to keep him for the next twenty years on various vigilante charges. And it's only after Anderson reads Batman's mind that she realizes the truth of what's going on. And she helps Batman to escape from justice. So instead of Batman teaming up with Judge Dredd, we have Judge Dredd pursuing Batman and Judge Anderson together.

PETER: *So a bond is never formed between Dredd and Batman? Do they continue to be on opposite sides throughout the story?*

ALAN: The bond that they form between them is a bond of intense mutual hatred.

PETER: *So they don't see any similarities between themselves that would lend themselves to an alliance.*

ALAN: No, they don't. Judge Dredd, once he has Batman in custody, conducts a particularly brutal interrogation of Batman, and Batman is so appalled at Dredd's fascist outlook that he busts the

"We picked Judge Death — he is a very visual character."

straps that bind him in a fit of anti-fascist rage and gives Dredd a bit of a good pummeling.

PETER: *In a past interview, you said that you had trouble with your Dredd stories in that you often tried to present him from a negative point of view, and you weren't sure it always came across.*

ALAN: Yeah.

PETER: *It seems to me from the way you're describing this story that Dredd is going to look pretty bad compared to Batman.*

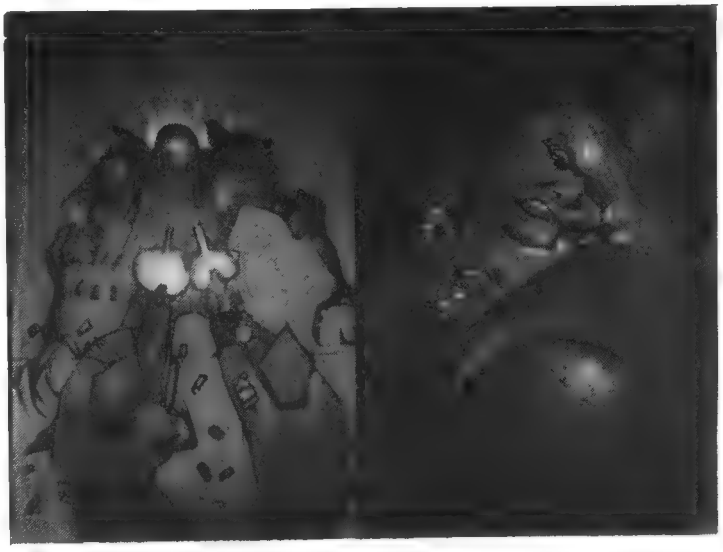
ALAN: Yeah, he is. But that's OK because that's the kind of guy he is. There are two ways of playing Judge Dredd: One is to play him as a total anti-hero; the other way he can be played is as a hero. He does get into heroic situations and does heroic things. He saves kids from fires; he'll endanger himself to save an innocent citizen. But at the same time, in the furtherance of the law, he will stoop to anything. He will, for instance, lie. Batman, I don't think, would ever lie for justice. Batman's first allegiance would be to the truth. The two really are incompatible. It's possible to play Dredd so that he's more compatible with Batman, but when Dredd's played that way, as far as I'm concerned, he becomes like any other hero, like anybody — Batman, Punisher, Spider-Man, Grodd the Gorilla, anybody you care to mention can rescue kids from fires and stop muggings and stuff like that. It's only when Dredd is treating the people that he's meant to be protecting as harshly as the people from whom he's protecting them that the essence of Dredd comes into play. A Dredd story's never really complete unless he arrests the victim as well as the perpetrator of the crime.

PETER: *So you have the paradox of Batman the vigilante having a stronger and purer commitment to morality than Dredd, the member of the establishment.*

ALAN: Yeah. Well, Dredd's establishment is a very immoral establishment. The judges keep themselves in power. They were elected, but I think that was fifty years ago. They're self-perpetuating.

PETER: *Batman is self-elected.*

ALAN: Yeah, but I think that Batman had a very valid reason for it. I'm not a typical comic-book reader, and I'm not a kid any longer — well, not really — but when I read BATMAN comics I always wanted to be Batman, and I'm sure the same goes for most readers. You read a BATMAN comic and you empathize with the character so completely that you wanted to be Batman. I have never read a Judge Dredd story where I felt I'd really like to be Judge Dredd. I may be totally wrong here, and **John Wagner,** for instance, might argue with me one hundred percent on it, but I would say BATMAN is much more of a drama, whereas Dredd is much more of a sitcom. It's MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS.



PETER: *Simon Bisley said he took Batman as a more serious crime-fighting figure and Dredd as a caricatured one.*

ALAN: Yeah? Yeah, I would agree with that. Batman — it sounds stupid as the writer of both characters to say this — to me Batman is real, could be real, and could have been real in any time in man's history, whereas Judge Dredd couldn't ever be real. Judge Dredd will always be a comic character.

PETER: *You said yesterday that at various times in the past Batman has been accused of being a fascistic character. But by pitting him against Judge Dredd, you're examining the question of how fascistic Batman is. You're drawing the line between him and this other character. And you said you regarded Batman as a sort of liberal vigilante?*

ALAN: Yeah, I do. I see Batman as having very strong left-wing leanings and sympathies. And I don't think I can do this — because it's against the American establishment, really — but I would dearly love to do Batman stories where Batman could end up defaming the American flag. The reason I don't do it is that I would be using it as a mouthpiece for my own views. And though I do that to a certain extent in BATMAN, Batman is actually much more than that. I owe something to fifty years of Batman fans, Batman stories, all the other writers and artists. They have made Batman into something that is intrinsically American, and whatever my personal views might be, the character of the Batman is pretty well set, and I don't want to screw around with that. So I couldn't make him as left-wing as I'd like him to be.

I've introduced a young character called Anarky, and I aim to follow his development, to parallel his development with Robin's. It depends on how long I'll keep on writing the book, that is. But I'll use the character of Anarky to say an awful lot of the things that I'd actually like Batman to say, but which are difficult for Batman to say.

PETER: *BATMAN: YEAR ONE struck me as presenting Batman as very much a Robin Hood figure taking on the forces of government in Gotham.*

ALAN: Well, I personally think BATMAN: YEAR ONE is the best Batman story I've ever read. I mean, I've not read all the Batman stories, obviously. But of the ones that I've read, I'd say that BATMAN: YEAR ONE is definitely the best. It's better than THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, by far.

PETER: *What are the reasons you picked the specific villains you did for the Batman-Dredd book?*

ALAN: We picked Judge Death because Judge Death is a very, very visual character. He has almost as strong a following on this side of the Atlantic as Dredd has. We picked the Mean Machine because he's simple, he's brutal, and he has a deadly sense of humor. Scarecrow, because he's really in my mind the spookiest of the Batman villains, and we needed a villain who could team up with Judge Death. And

"British comics are turned out on a weekly basis."

these two went together. Like, we couldn't team up the Penguin with Judge Death, for instance. It wouldn't have worked. We couldn't have used the Catwoman. None of them are in the same sort of league. Even the Joker couldn't have teamed up with Judge Death, I think. But the Scarecrow, because of fear and terror, was the perfect one to choose for. And the two of them actually work really well together. They make a great team.

PETER: *You said yesterday that Judge Death performs in a rock concert by the end of the story. You also said you wanted a story with laughs in it. Does this all mean that you see an element of comedy — even an element of camp — as necessary to the costumed hero action-adventure story, whether it's Batman or Dredd or anyone else?*

ALAN: No, I don't necessarily see it with Batman. I can write Batman stories which I think — whether or not they *are* is up to the readers — are a punching human drama — they're real. It's not necessarily an intrinsic part of the superhero world for me. After quite a lot of experience writing for British comics — non-humor stories — I long ago realized that unless a story has some sort of little humorous element in it, I'm very likely to become bored with it very quickly. I think I was saying this last night with respect to the Punisher, although I don't mean any disrespect to the character of the Punisher. He's a good character; he's been phenomenally popular. But at the same time there's absolutely no humor in him. When **John Wagner** and I sit down and write something that we enjoy writing, like the Batman-Dredd team-up, for instance, it's a joy. It's not like working; it's like sitting rapping and having a good time for three or four hours with somebody you know really well. It's fun. But sitting down to do our PUNISHER graphic novel was like going to do your job at a factory or an office, because you weren't going to laugh. There was no humor in it; it was deadly serious, and because of that, we were worried that we were making the story dull. I'm assured by Marvel that we haven't made the story dull; they're very happy with it. But at the same time it's not an experience that John and I would care to run through again and write another one.

PETER: *What are your other projects for the future. You're continuing to write BATMAN?*

ALAN: Yeah, I've just signed a contract to write another year of BATMAN. I'm

going to be doing LOBO for the next year. I've signed on with DEMON to do up to issue #24; I don't know whether or not I'll be able to continue after that. With L.E.G.I.O.N. '91 my contract runs out on issue #39, and I've given them advance notice that I may well have to quit with #39 because my work load's getting too big.

PETER: *I'm impressed with this work load just hearing about it.*

ALAN: *(Laughter.)* This is on this side of the Atlantic then; I'm doing a story about a Scottish mutant for the JUDGE DREDD monthly magazine. I'm doing another story for the same magazine, which is a horror story; it's like a Mega-City version of ALIEN or PREDATOR or something like that. For the British comic TOXIC I'm doing a story called "Macabre." This is a new British comic; it's just been released. For the same comic I'm doing a story called "The Garbage Man," which is a superhero spoof about a guy who gets turned into a garbage man.

PETER: *A man made of garbage?*

ALAN: Exactly

PETER: *A Garbage-Thing.*

ALAN: Yeah. He constantly changes and warps and shifts.

PETER: *So how many of you are there, then? It sounds as if this is a workload for three people.*

ALAN: Perhaps it's because of the kind of comics that I write. Perhaps because I'm not that serious. It's probably a lot faster to write action stories than it is to write stories that go into any sort of detailed examination of the human soul or motivations for human actions. As I explained yesterday, British comics are turned out on a weekly basis, and when you're limited to four, five, or six pages in which to say something, you've got to really keep things moving fast and keep them funny to keep the reader coming back to buy the next issue.

PETER: *And you seem very concerned with your connection with the audience.*

ALAN: Well, if I like what I've written, I don't care if anybody else likes it or not — although it gives me great joy if people send me letters saying that a particular story made them cry, for instance. I really like getting letters from people who say that my stories made them cry.

Long before I got into comics, I was a successful romantic fiction writer. I worked as a freelancer on a variety of magazines. You must have them in the States as well: magazines with titles like TRUE CONFESSIONS. There used to be a whole line of them in this country in

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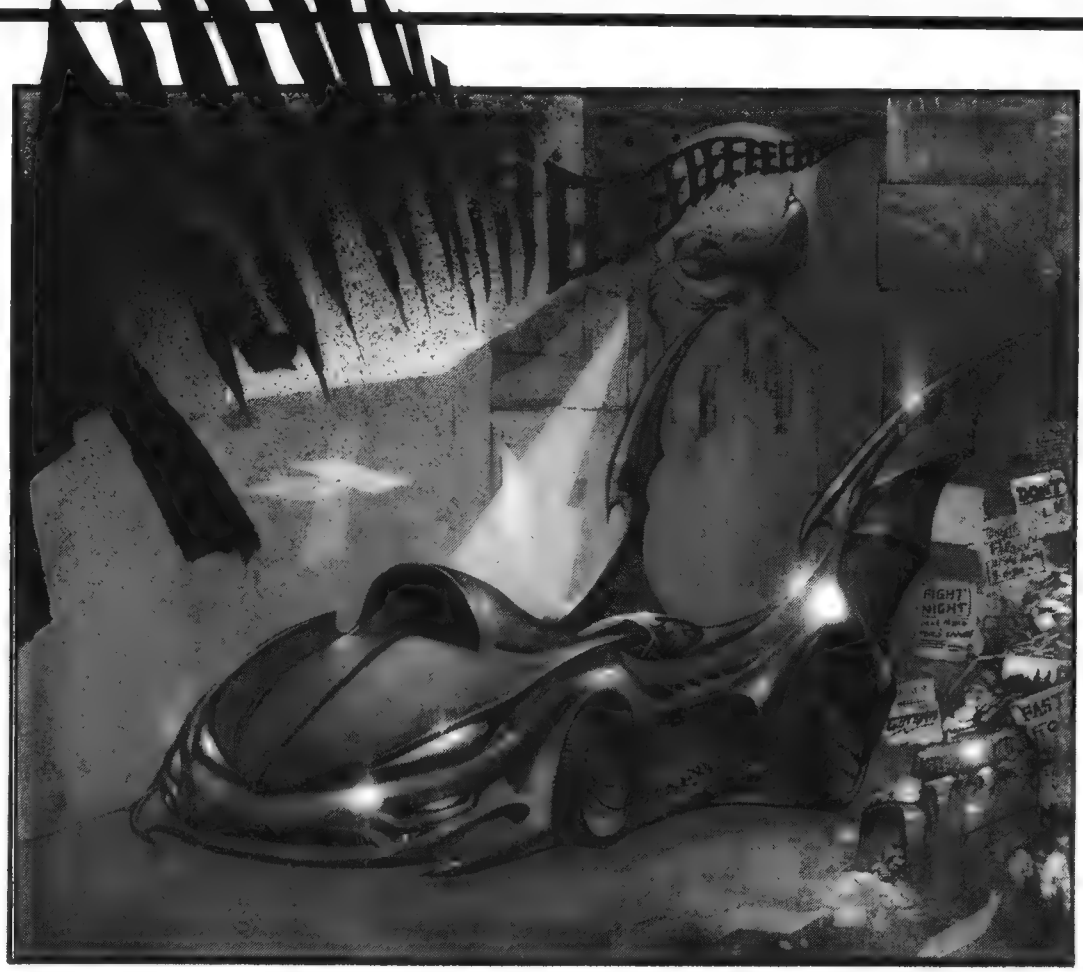
"People here tend to look toward creator-owned material."



the late '60s, early '70s. And that was actually how I first became a success. It wasn't as a comics writer. I never set out to be a comics writer; I just wanted to be a writer. I spent years writing stories with titles like "My Boyfriend was a Hell's Angel," and "I Stole to Get an Abortion." All of them were written under female pseudonyms, obviously *(Laughter.)*. So all of my training is as a romantic fiction writer, not a comics writer. I suppose where I get my love of action comics is basically from Marvel Comics during my teenage years. I was an avid Marvel fan.

PETER: *This would be during the 1960s?*

ALAN: I was eleven years old when Marvel released THE FANTASTIC FOUR, Prince Namor, THE HULK, THE AVENGERS. I really was an avid collector. I knew all the BATMAN mythos. I knew Superman's story. I knew and loved the Bizarros and Green Lantern and all the rest of them. But when Marvel came out, it was like those were the comics that I had waited for. And I saved up Marvel Comics for, like, the next ten years or something.

PETER: *So you'd like to write some traditional Marvel characters?*

ALAN: Well, yes. **John Wagner** and **Simon Bisley** and I have a proposal with Marvel for a DOCTOR STRANGE painted graphic novel featuring Nightmare and Morbius the Living Vampire.

I'm also doing a project with **Bisley** and somebody you've probably never heard of, named **Tony Luke.** He majored in animation film production. You'll be seeing his name in the future because he and I have been working on other things together. We've done a limited series for Marvel called PSYCHONAUTS.

I've got two things that I'm working up as proposals for the moment for **Art Young's** Touchmark Comics (a division of Disney Comics). One of the things I'm doing for him is called NECRONOMICON which, again, I'm doing in conjunction with **Tony Luke,** and is about a demon-hunter, and the second one is called THE HANGED MAN.

I don't know if it's the same in the States, but people in this country tend to be looking more towards creator-owned material. With this new comic that came out, TOXIC, they started out with the premise that the writers and artists would retain copyright on all their work.

We — when I say "we," I'm usually talking about myself and **John Wagner,** because we're worked together for such a long time — we did a story for Marvel UK called "The Chronicles of Genghis Grimtoad," which you've probably never heard of. It's not exactly a kiddie story, but it's THE HOBBIT rather than LORD OF THE RINGS. And it's something we just did as a light-hearted exercise. Anyway, just this morning we got royalty checks from Marvel for sales to France and sales to Germany, which excites me greatly. Much as I enjoy working, which I do — I've spent quite a lot of my time doing it — one of the few feelings which rivals it is the feeling that you get when you get a royalty check. Something that you get for something that you've already been paid for. It's great to have people give you money for nothing, so to speak.

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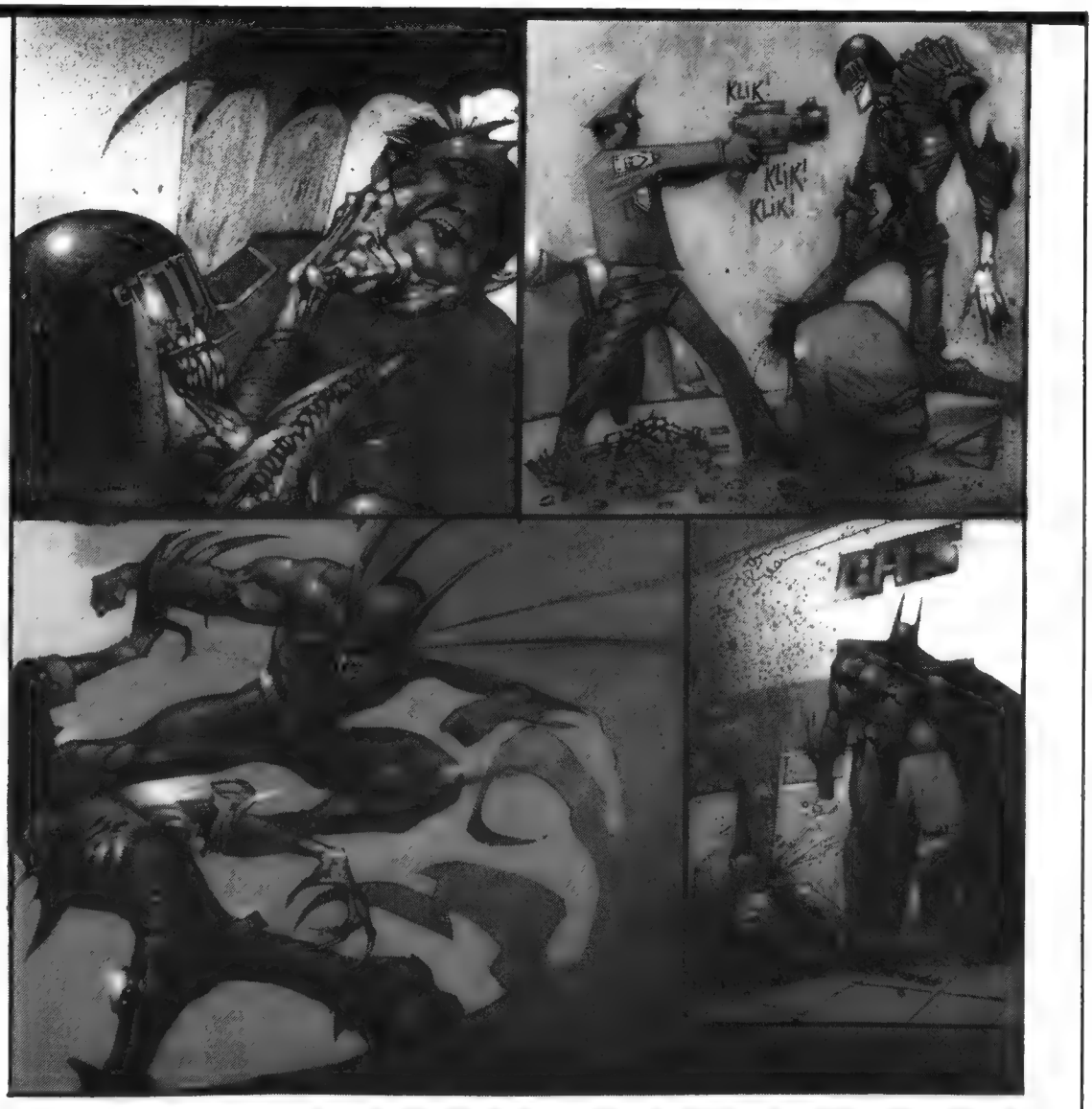


Batman/Judge Dredd: JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM ™1991 DC Comics Inc. and Fleetway Publications Ltd. All rights reserved.

Dark clouds can have silver linings, and having to do an interview twice can be rewarding. By now you are familiar with the tale of my tape recorder malfunctioning during my first interviews with artist Simon Bisley and writer Alan Grant, collaborators on the forthcoming Batman-Judge Dredd book JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM (with co-writer John Wagner) and on DC's LOBO (with Keith Giffen). After the first interviews Bisley and Grant continued to think over the topics we had discussed. So in the second interview, Grant was able to expand further upon the ideas he ex-

SIMON BISLEY

"When I go to London, I find it claustrophobic and

pressed in the first session. Simon Bisley, on the other hand, ended up revising his opinions on various matters having to do with Batman and Judge Dredd, as you will see in the interview that follows.

PETER SANDERSON: *Last time you were talking about your fascination with Judge Death, Judge Dredd's principal nemesis, who is one of the villains in the Batman/Judge Dredd book.*

SIMON BISLEY: That's right. We talked about his struggle to live, even in death. He's kind of masquerading as life. He takes other people's lives almost because they live, you know, and he wants to take that away from them.

PETER: *That's one of the reasons you are intrigued by Judge Death?*

SIMON: Mmm. No, I don't think I'm particularly intrigued by Judge Death. I just think I was intrigued by death in general. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Well, you said that was part of the reason you were interested in doing*

an unfriendly place—New York is 50 times bigger."

Judge Death in this story.

SIMON: Yeah, that's right. That's part of the reason, because I'm fascinated with death. The whole idea that we live and then we just die, simple as that. I don't know why, but death fascinates. Death is the great unknown. It's something that nobody understands.

PETER: *So to deal with a character who embodies death is, in a way, to investigate what death means?*

SIMON: Yeah. You've got it to a "T." He has to be one of the most feared villains in comics because he is pure 100% death. So I think he's quite disgusting.

PETER: *So a story about him taps into primal fears.*

SIMON: Yeah.

PETER: *He's not just a costumed criminal robbing banks.*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)* Well, no. It's like what I feel about Batman himself: he's like dicing with death. He almost wants to die. That's why he's risking his neck all the time, you know, because he's so fucked up in the head about his mother and father dying and everything else. He's screwed up in that respect. He's almost on his way out as it is, you know.

PETER: *So it's almost as if death is his real enemy from the start, because he's in the business of crimefighting, because death claimed his parents.*

SIMON: Exactly.

PETER: *So, as you say, it's almost as if he's got a death wish, but at the same time he's always fighting people who are trying to kill him. So it's like a struggle between life and death.*

SIMON: What we're talking about is very, very interesting, but JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM doesn't really deal with this. It's not that in-depth. It's very one-dimensional. Judge Death is just death, and he goes running around killing people.

PETER: *Still, the story must have some subtext to explain why it has such emotional resonance.*

SIMON: No, it doesn't, really. There might be, if you look hard enough, but it's not apparent.

PETER: *On the surface, then, it's basically just a fun story?*

SIMON: It's just basically a fun story, but it has got a black humor. I think the more deep kind of stuff is more for **Grant Morrison** and **Alan Moore** and these kinds of guys. Which I would in fact like to work with and indulge the kind of thing we were talking about back there. I think it's interesting on both sides of the coin: the slapstick or the really serious kind of shit.

PETER: *We were also talking previously about the idea that Batman and Judge Dredd were similar types of characters, both being obsessive crimefighters. But you said you had a great deal of respect for Batman and looked up to him, whereas you saw Judge Dredd as more of a caricature of a crimefighter.*

SIMON: Yeah. Judge Dredd just totally lacks any kind of personality; I feel Batman does, as well. He's a visually strong character. Judge Death is a real character in the story, because you can relate to him more than to Batman and Judge Dredd.

PETER: *You saw Batman and Dredd as two sides of the same coin, but one was the hero portrayed seriously and the other was the hero portrayed absurdly.*

SIMON: Yeah, I feel I've changed my mind since we talked last, because I feel Judge Dredd is actually a more realistic character, because you actually get characters like that in South Africa, you know? Or in places like Russia, a police state where Judge Dredd would be totally acceptable. But in the context of our own countries, that kind of thing would not be acceptable.

Batman is more farcical because Judge Dredd actually has a real purpose. He's a loner, and he lives in a violent society, and so he acts as he does because he has to, in order to survive, to carry his job through. So Batman is more farcical because he has no real purpose. What is his motivation? The fact that his parents have been killed. That's his motivation to go around in a cloak.

It could be completely vice versa, if you like.

PETER: *Last time you said that Batman represented ideals that could be admired, whereas Dredd did not.*

SIMON: Judge Dredd has got zero ideals, whereas Batman's more a kind of medieval knight, kind of an Ivanhoe-type of character. Sometimes I think he's almost too goody-goody.

PETER: *Although last time you were saying how visually he reminded you of a devil figure, and that you even tried to make Gotham City look hot, as if it were a city turned to hell.*

SIMON: Yeah. I thought Gotham was a sort of stylized New York — what it might be in, say, another five years time, were it'll be even more stuffy and crowded. The feeling that comes across, living in that environment, is that it's very stuffy and hot. It can be a nice winter's day, but it's still claustrophic. I mean, you know, you live there, for Christ's sake.

PETER: *Yes. I don't think I'll have to wait five years. Five months will probably do it.*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Have you been to New York, or did you just get an impression of this place from watching television and movies?*

SIMON: I get it from the way that people talk to me who I speak to in America. I don't know, it's just a general feeling I get from, yeah, I suppose from what I see. I live in the country, the green fields of England. When I go to London, I find it incredibly claustrophobic and a particularly unfriendly place. So if you equate that to New York, which is going to be fifty times bigger, up and down and in every direction, I can imagine it's going to be absolutely dreadful.

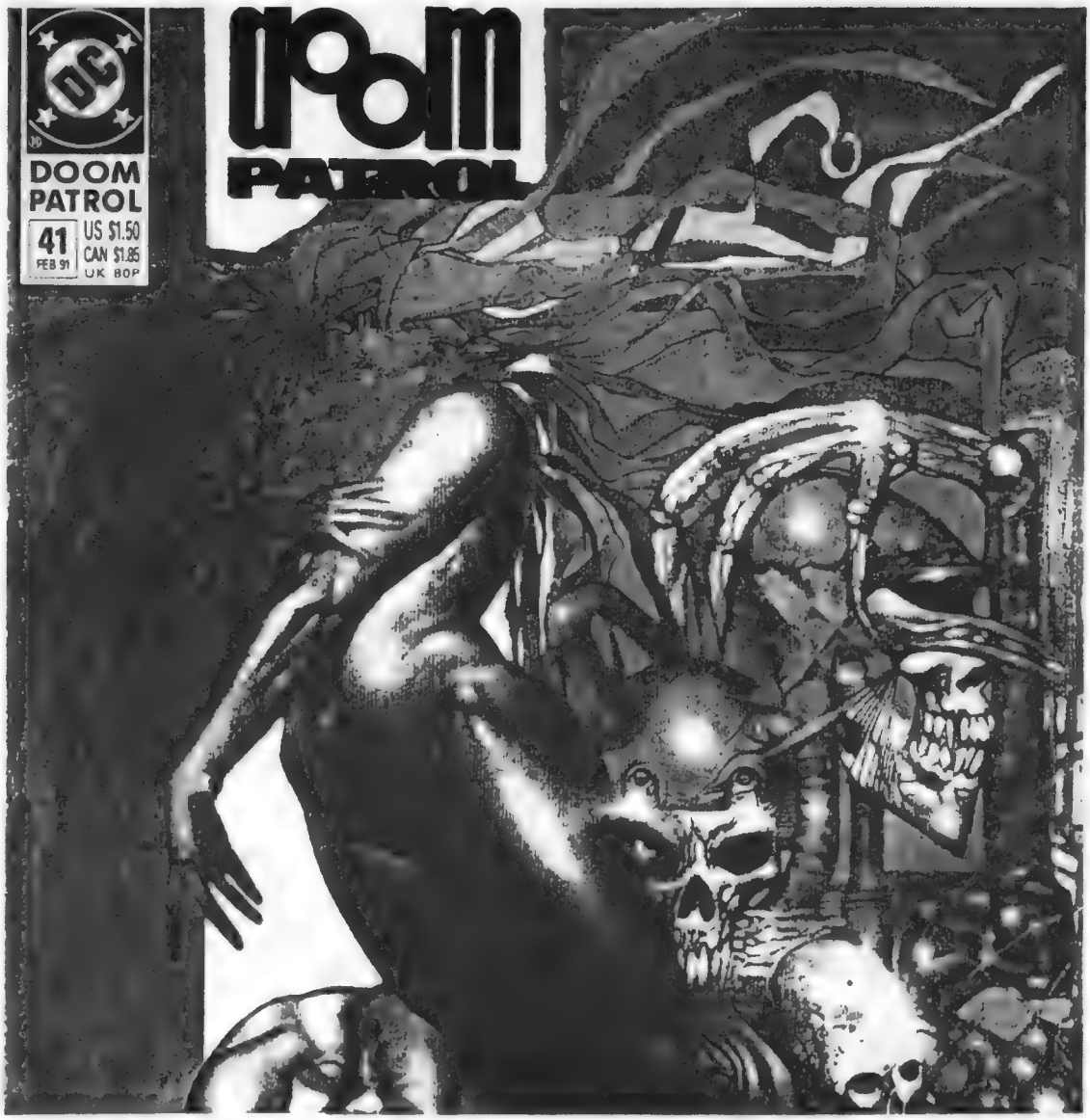
PETER: *Actually, London seems to me to be very peaceful compared to New York.*

SIMON: It came around to my view on Mega-City. I see it as a cold, **Giger**-type of environment. I should think Gotham would be more a bubbly place, although extremely violent, more like the circus. Whereas Mega-City wouldn't be fun; you'd be arrested.

PETER: *And what about your plans for the future? You'll be doing a BATMAN graphic novel with Neil Gaiman.*

SIMON: I have no idea what the story's about. I'll have to find out when the

"Ideally, what I'd like is just to do painted covers."



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script has been written. I'm also doing a Superman story with **Dave Gibbons.** And all the next year I'll be doing LOBO.

PETER: *Including what I'm told is a Christmas special.*

SIMON: That's right, which is again exceptionally farcical. Lobo has a contract out on Father Christmas.

PETER: *And has a knife fight with him, I'm told.*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, well, Father Christmas is really depicted as a gangster kind of character. I think he's actually making nuclear warheads, not toys. I think that's what I remember. So it's got a sort of serious angle, I suppose, if you want to look at it that way.

I've started to work more with Epic, stuff I like, like HELLRAISER covers. It seems to me since I've been doing the DOOM PATROL covers it's been generating interest in my doing other covers. Ideally, what I'd like is just to do painted covers. Because if I can make $1500 on a cover, to do the same I'd have to do an entire episode of LOBO.

Money. That's what it's all about, isn't it?

PETER: *Well, I'd like to think it's about more, too.*

SIMON: Oh, yeah. If you can do the jobs you want to do, and get money at the same time, it's like getting paid for what you were going to do anyway. It's like I've heard some actor on television say, "I'm getting paid for doing this, and it's what I love to do." Which is marvelous, you know.

PETER: *That's the secret.*

SIMON: I'm fortunate enough to do this at present. I can more-or-less pick and choose, for the time being.

PETER: *It sounds as if doing covers, single images, interests you more than comics storytelling, doing a narrative over many pages.*

SIMON: Yes, it does. I prefer just to do one image. It's like if I had a guitar, I'd have to learn how to play it in a day or get rid of it. I can only concentrate for a very short period of time. I adore doing comics, but to convey everything, to do everything in just one image, is far more satisfying to me.

Art: BRIAN STELFREEZE

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One of life's rare pleasures is good conversation--and what a pleasure it can be! Especially when it's on subjects near and dear to our hearts, subjects of specialized personal interest such as, in our case -- comics.

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COMICS INTERVIEW is rich in good conversation. Whether or not you care for the comics work of the folks interviewed here, I think you'll find a wealth of insight and intelligence in what they have to say -- and some mighty fine conversation.

-Dave

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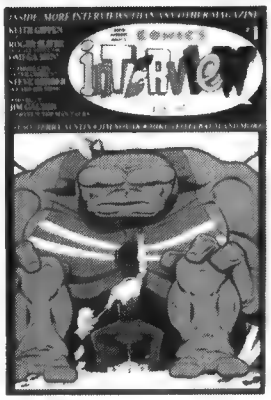

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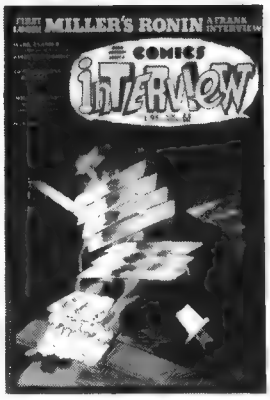

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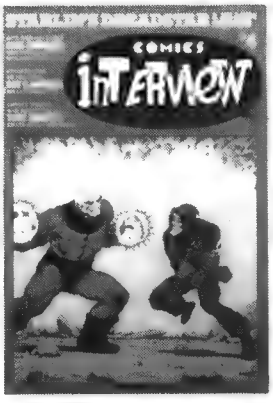

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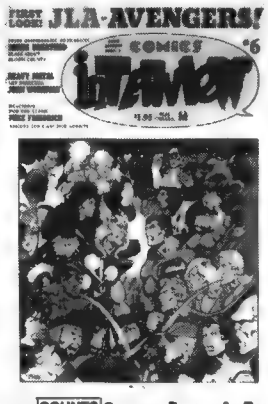

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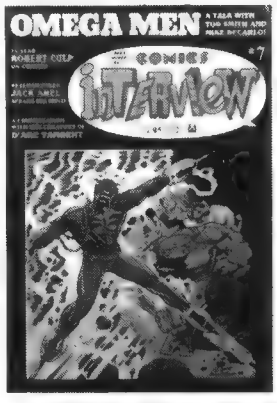

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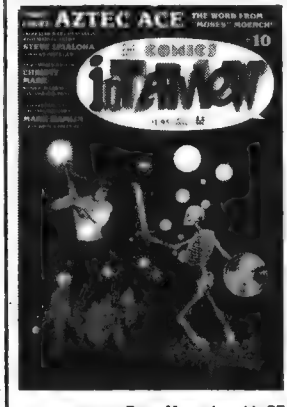

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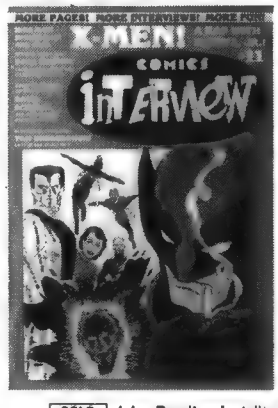

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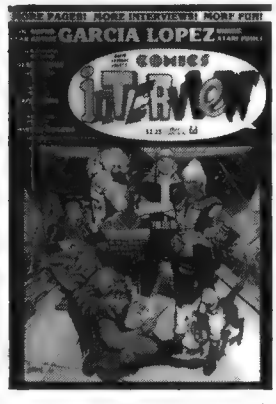

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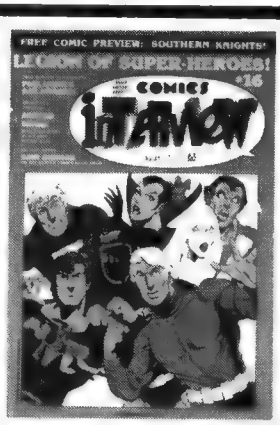

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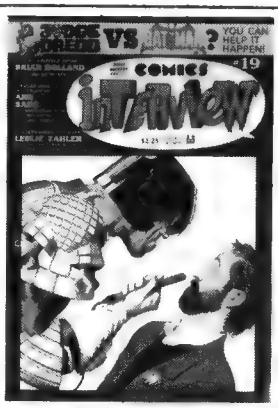

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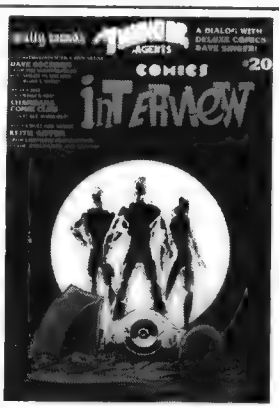

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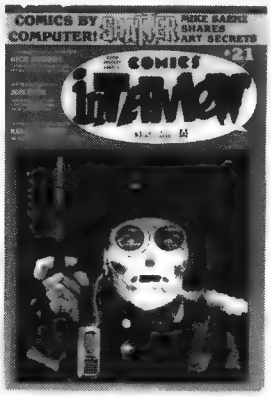

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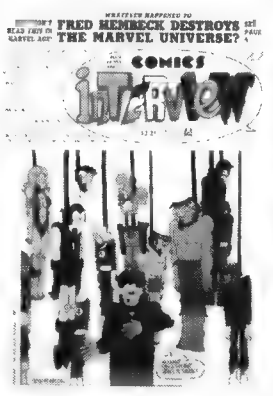

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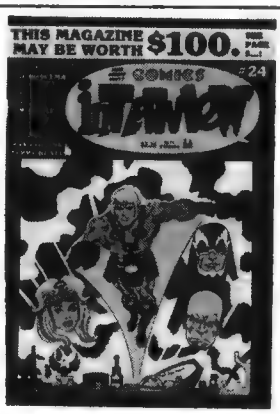

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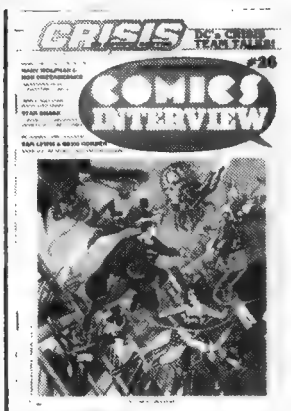

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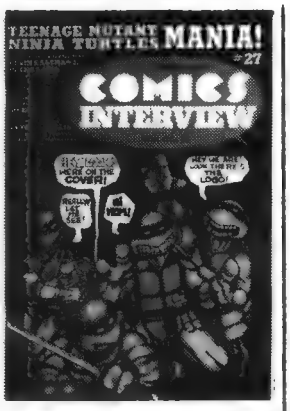

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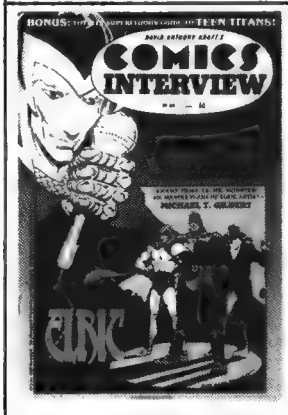

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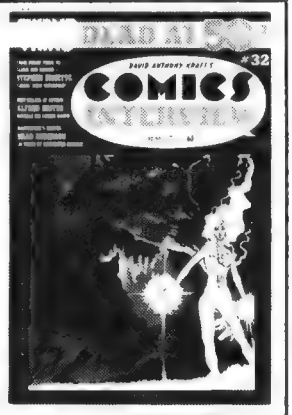

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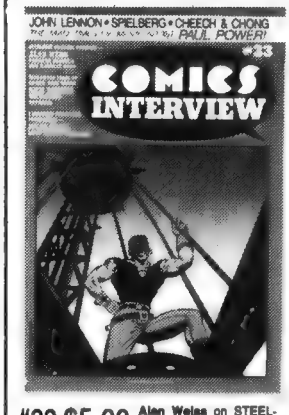

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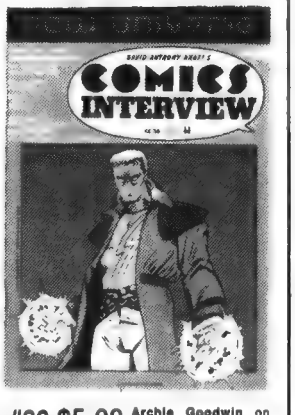

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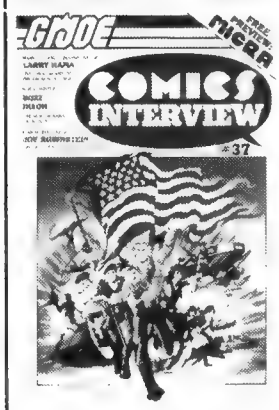

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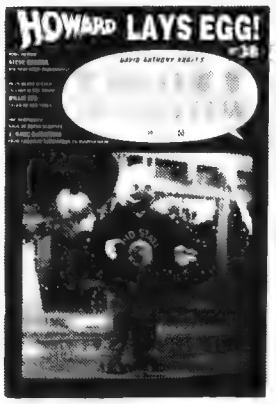

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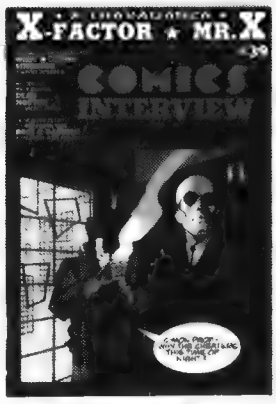

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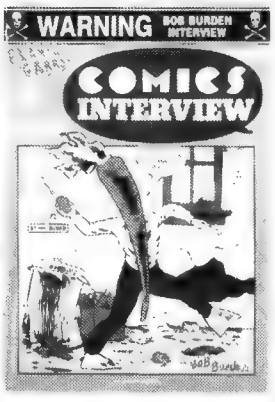

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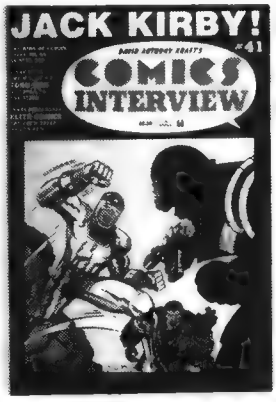

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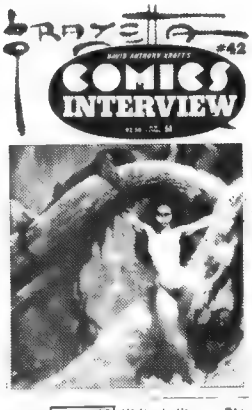

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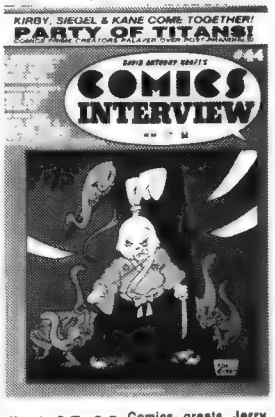

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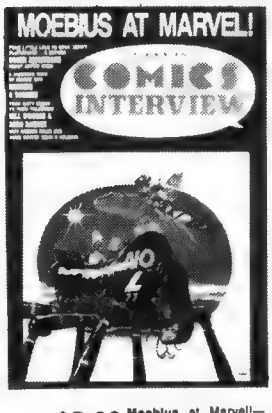

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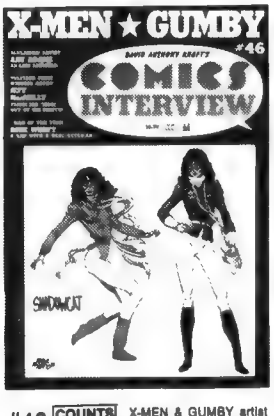

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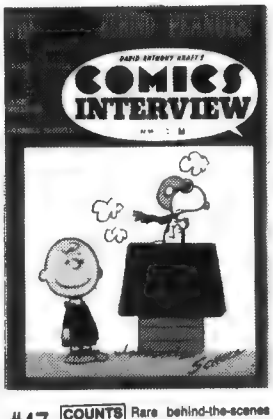

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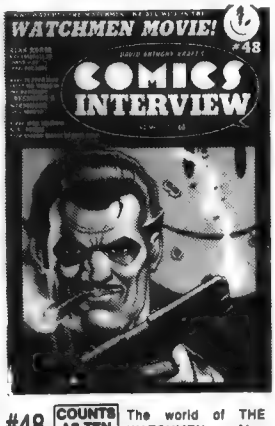

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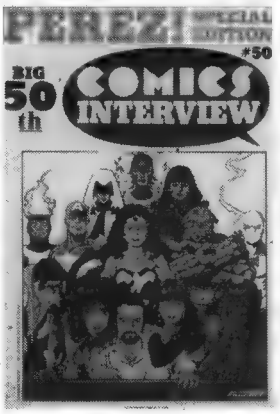

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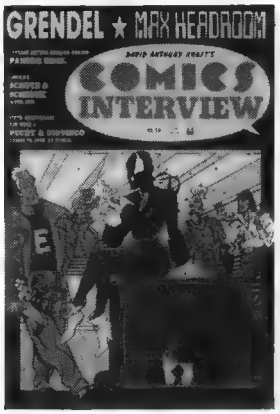

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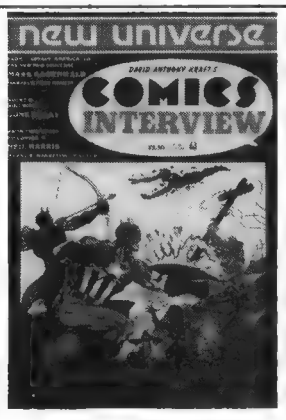

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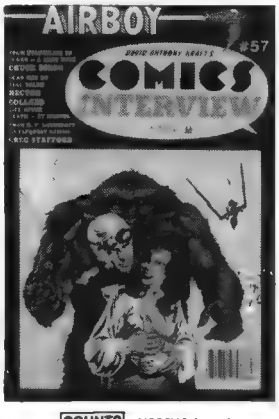

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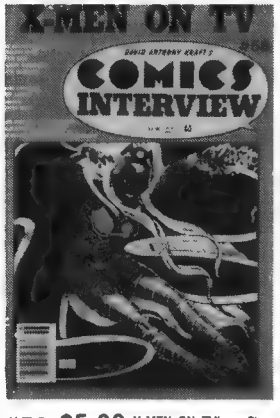

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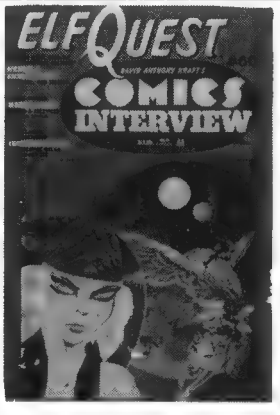

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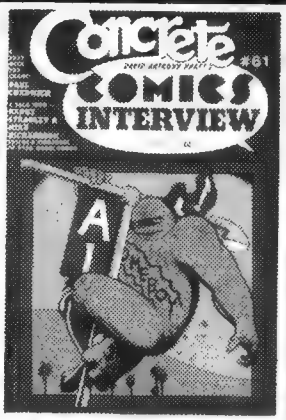

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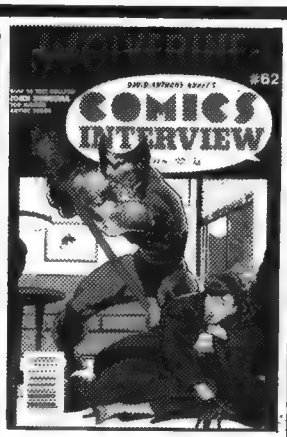

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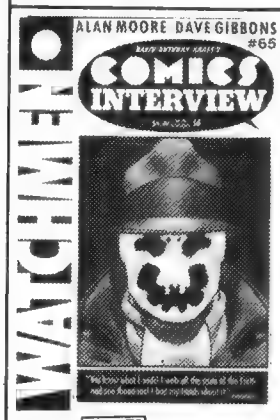

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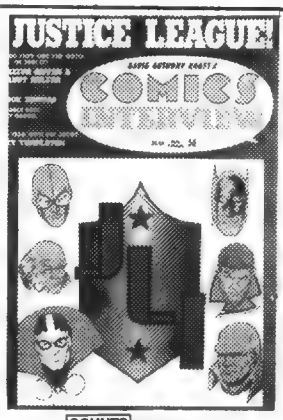

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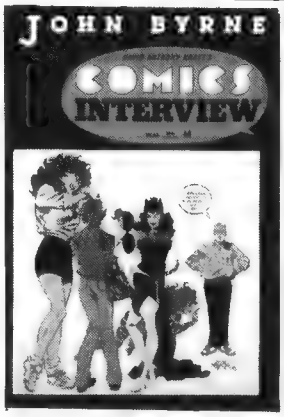

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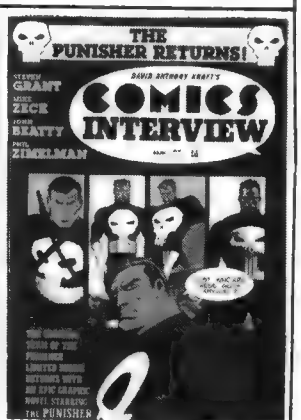

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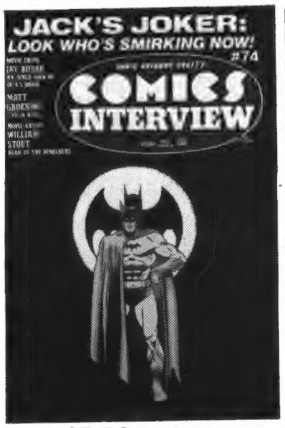

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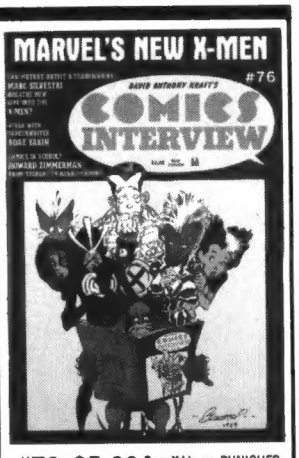

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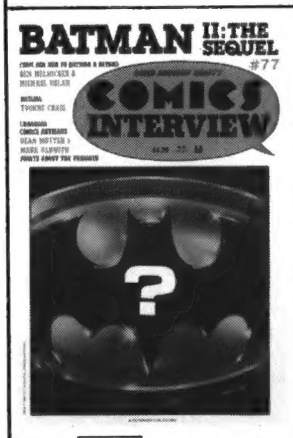

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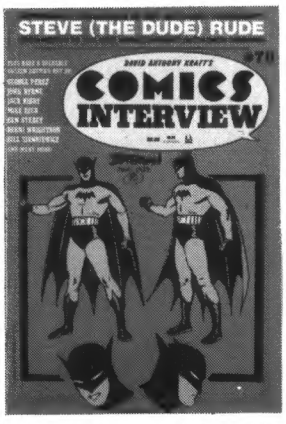

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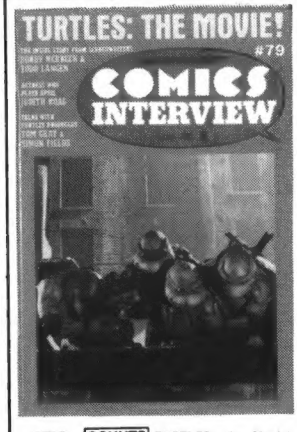

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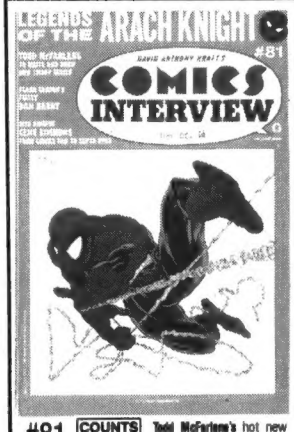

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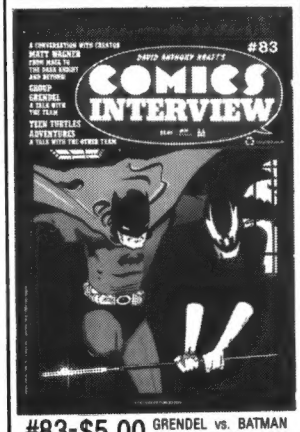

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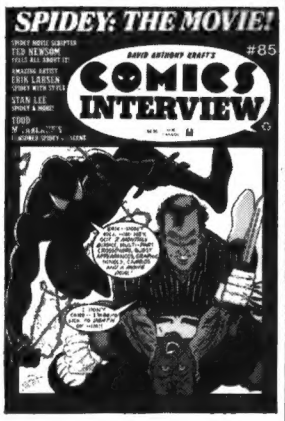

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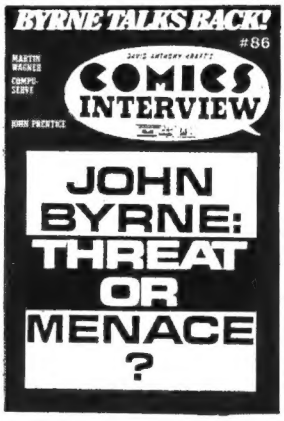

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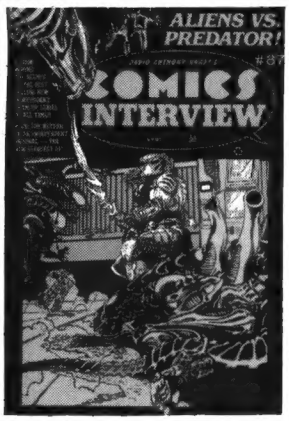

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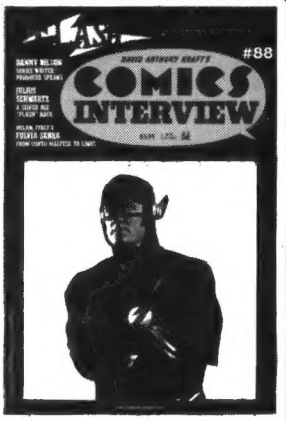

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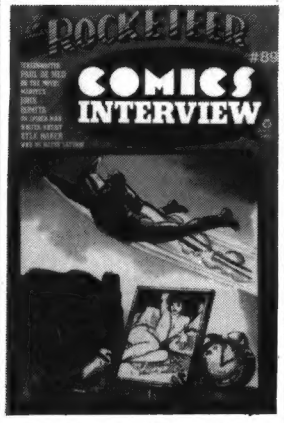

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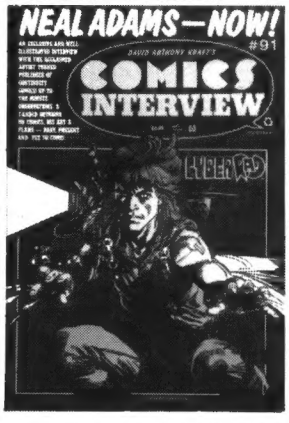

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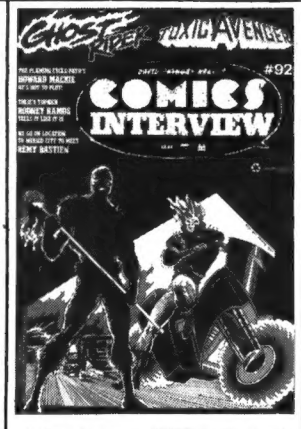

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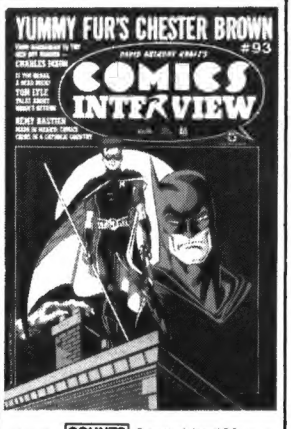

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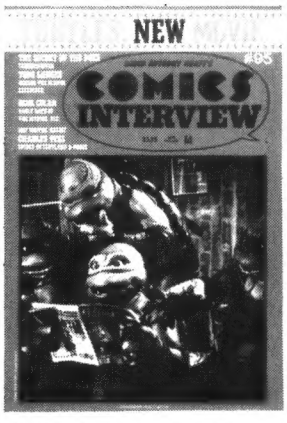

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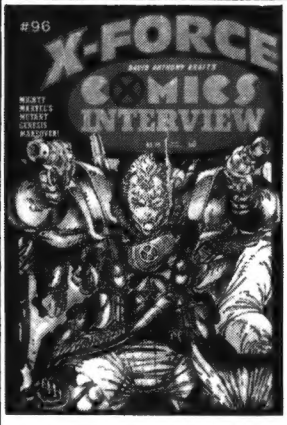

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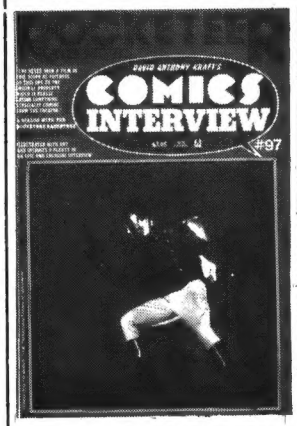

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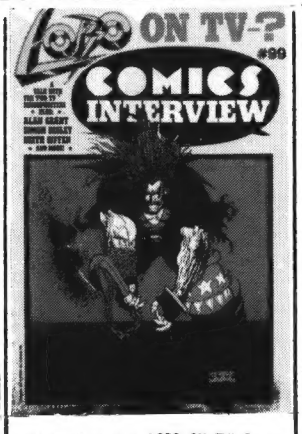

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